

"Making home in the wrong place"

[For those online, there is the text of Scripture at the end]

Introduction

This story today reads like a Hollywood thriller. Twists of deceit and romance, kindness and luring, wanton lust and murder. Ah, great drama. And if you are Jewish you might read this story today with a bit of wincing and embarrassment. Some shameful things are done in the name of revenge and family affection. But central to the whole issue today is 'making home in the wrong place.' I believe most of today's trouble in the story of Jacob and family is due to their disobedience to God's clear directive.

Where were the Jewish people supposed to live? God had told Jacob to return to Bethel (31.13) and next week, he will go to his home where Isaac still lived which was Hebron (35.27). Instead of going to Bethel, Jacob waited, he lingered, first at Succot and then settled near Shechem. At the former he built a house, then when he moved near Shechem, he purchased a piece of property and became like me in Australia, a resident alien. He was settling down. This is the problem.

It's not that one cannot move countries, but a child of Abraham is destined to dwell with his fathers and live in the land of his fathers. Obedience is the norm for a child of God and anything less than that is out of biblical bounds. Jacob again pushes the boundaries and has pain rather than pleasure as a result. God wants us to live in pleasure. Our choice is the key.

1. JACOB DELAYS IN OBEDIENCE

Dr. George Sweeting wrote in *Special Sermons for Special Days*: "Several years ago our family visited Niagara Falls. It was spring, and ice was rushing down the river. As I viewed the large blocks of ice flowing toward the falls, I could see that there were carcasses of dead fish embedded in the ice. Gulls by the score were riding down the river feeding on the fish. As they came to the brink of the falls, their wings would go out, and they would escape from the falls.

"I watched one gull which seemed to delay and wondered when it would leave. It was engrossed in the carcass of a fish, and when it finally came to the brink of the falls, out went its powerful wings. The bird flapped and flapped and even lifted the ice out of the water, and I thought it would escape. But it had delayed too long so that its claws had frozen into the ice. The weight of the ice was too great, and the gull plunged into the abyss."

The finest attractions of this world become deadly when we become overly attached to them. They may take us to our destruction if we cannot give them up. And as Sweeting observed, "Oh, the danger of delay!" (George Sweeting)

This notion of delay and its consequences was made clear about a decade ago as reported in the magazine *US News and World Report* about a situation in Chicago. For most of the previous decade, Chicagoland residents who worked in the Loop, the booming central business district, could easily ignore the city's budget crisis. Washington's cutback of aid to cities didn't seem to hurt business. Last week, they learned one price of neglecting the underpinnings of all that economic growth. A quarter-billion gallons of murky Chicago River water

gushed into a 60-mile network of turn-of-the-century freight tunnels under the Loop and brought nearly all businesses to a soggy halt. It turned out that a top city official had known about the leak, but, acting for a cash-strapped government, had delayed repairs costing only about \$50,000. The final cost of the damage could run higher than \$1 billion. *U.S. News & World Report*, April 27, 1992.

That's one of the lessons in today's sermon from the life of Jacob-- don't delay. Do you watch that new TV show about the race around the world? *Amazing Race* pits couples against one another traveling at often-breakneck speed from one major capital city to another with much human drama tossed in via videotape private comments to make it interesting. Who will win? Who will stay together as a couple?

During each episode each pair has to decide at a juncture, called the Detour. This is a choice given them to take say, a boat to an island or a bicycle to the next town. At either location they will get the next clue. So it seems that there is little difference on initial inspection. However, the method of travel usually brings certain other dangers and episodes of interaction, which only we who are watching understand.

That's what we find in today's story, isn't it? Jacob is told to go to Bethel and yet he delays. His lingering causes a detour that eventuates in his daughter being raped, and his sons becoming murderers in response to that rape. Jacob was not in a hurry to return to Bethel. Sacrifice is no substitute for obedience (1 Sam 15.22) and Jacob's altar is no substitute for the travel home.

Regrets may linger with him for decades because of this delaying choice. I know that my bad choices in life still haunt me years and in some cases over a decade ago.

2. JACOB'S FAMILY DEFILED

Dinah is careless (verse 1) about her friendships and commitments. We don't really know what she has been taught by her parents. So we cannot fault her in disobedience to the future Torah injunctions. Was she naive, rebellious, or just ignorant? The name of the Lord is not mentioned in chapter 34. His wisdom also seems to be absent. We only have to quickly review the history of the patriarchs to feel the 'ouch' of Dinah's mistake: Abraham at Gerar (12.10-20; 20.1), Lot in Sodom (19.1ff), Isaac also at Gerar (26.6-16). Later in the Bible, stories like Samson in Philistia (Judges 14, 16) and Peter in the high priest's courtyard (Luke 22.54ff) also evidence this.

Dinah is looking at, but literally into the daughters of the land. This is her mistake. She longs to be like them. She looked into their situation, into their culture, into their lifestyle and longed for it. This is the same sin as committed by Lot's wife (chapter 19).

Dinah is defiled (verses 2-5) by Shechem. This verb defiled is used thrice to make it clear that it wasn't just love misplaced; it was defilement. Shechem's claim was one of innocent affection and longing, but honestly keeping her as a hostage at his house after violently raping her, this is nothing other than defilement. And it's illegal in many countries today. If it isn't, it ought to be!

Let's think about the two cultures in conflict here. Shechem is Canaanite and Jacob and family is not. In one culture what Shechem did is tolerated. In the other, it brought about violent vengeance. Sexual activity for the Jewish people then and now, and certainly biblically, is only within the marriage context. One man and one woman. The Mosaic law declared what Shechem did a sin and a crime (Lev. 18). At issue in today's lesson is the culture battle and that Jacob had chosen to live in the wrong culture.

Charles Colson in his 1987 book *Kingdoms in Conflict* wrote, "The family is the most basic unit of government. AS the first community to which a person is attached and the first authority under which a person learns to live, the family establishes society's most basic values. Colson then goes on to cite Paul Johnson who observed that the 'family is an alternative to the state as a focus of loyalty and thus a humanizing force in society.'" (Morrow/ Zondervan, 1987, p. 90)

That's why the situation with Shechem is so horrible. Dinah is to learn godly standards and to share those with her family. And the family is to teach and inculcate godly wisdom. This rape and hostage scene is anything but that.

Let's talk for a bit about the Hebrew word translated here as 'his soul longs' in verse 8. "But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter; please give her to him in marriage." In the Bible I'm reading this year, called "The Message" by Eugene Peterson, he translates it as "My son Shechem is head over heels in love with your daughter" This more accurately translates the spirit of the Hebrew ^{word} "Chashka".

John Piper in his book *The Pleasures of God* writes about this verb. He is citing Deuteronomy chapter 10.14-15. Let's read that. "Behold, to the LORD your

God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. "Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day". Here the word chashak is used in verse 15. And it's used in combination with the usual word for love in the Hebrew, which is ahavah.

Piper says, "it seems that the double word for love is a way of strongly emphasizing that the motive here was love rooted only in love and nothing else. The love was deep and passionate and full of desire. Hence it seems right to suggest the translated, "The Lord delighted in your fathers to love them" //

That sounds like what is motivating Shechem. Deep desire. Or as Peterson says, "Head over heels." But it is not sanctified desire. It's passion without commitment and without covenant. It's raw sex. And thus he prevents her departure, and thus he raped her against her will.

In the book *Be Authentic* written by Warren Wiersbe, commenting on this section Wiersbe says, "Shechem's actions and words bore witness only to the fact that God's people and the people of Canaan had different standards of conduct." (Victor Publ, 1997, page 63) And friends this is the bottom line, isn't it? We are going to do different deeds because we are of different substance inside. We have been born again. And God's desires are sanctified; they are different. And so we should be as well.

3. JACOB'S SONS DECEIVE THE TOWN

Now we move to the next part of the story, when the brothers come in from the farm and hear about the rape of their sister. Oh, are they livid! And they

want revenge. Now if my only sister had been raped by the townspeople nearby, I would also have been angered and naturally so. So when Simeon and Levi are named as the murderers in due course, you wonder what happened. You wonder if the 'hey guys, do this and we'll get along' dowry was genuine.

The brothers had devised this plan that if the Canaanites would be circumcised that the intermarriage could continue and they would all live happily ever after. Were they disingenuous or what!

The Canaanites saw this policy as an opportunity to absorb Israel and gradually possess their wealth and their people. Jacob's sons used it as a means to weaken the men and get them ready for easy slaughter. This is classical bait and switch deception. Neither side was acting in a kosher way, were they?

4. VENGEANCE OF JACOB'S SONS ON THE CANAANITES

As we read, the sons of Jacob Simeon and Levi went on a murderous rampage while the men of the city were in recovery from their adult surgical procedure. They were weak and couldn't fight. Circumcision finds its way into the pages of Scripture again and again as a way to remind us that you are weak and need to be trusting God. It's a covenantal sign and demonstrates like Jacob's wobbling legs from chapter 32 that God is able to override you in your strongest element and make you weak.

But the Canaanites were not weak, showing faith in God. They were equally tricky as Jacob had been in the past. And the boys learned it well from their daddy. It would have been hard for Jacob to correct his number two and three sons for deception, as it often characterized him in his youth.

But Jacob was angry at his boys. And he was frightened about what the reaction would be. From God? No, I've already told you there is no mention of God in this chapter. Jacob is fearful about the reaction of the neighbouring villages. He still has the fear of man in him, doesn't he? And we will see the relationship with Shechem later in the blessing of Jacob at chapter 49 and each time there are near visits that some of the brothers are a bit worried. Like Jacob seeing Esau first in his mind and then physically after 20 years, there is often good reason to fear repercussions from past grievances.

Here is Jacob who is learning the Abrahamic covenant, that he is to be blessed to be a blessing. Jacob is figuring out that he is to build an altar and worship God in the midst of the heathen. So he has done this and is beginning a witness in the land. But now, his own children ruin his testimony living like the pagans. Sadly Jacob is not concerned about God's righteousness or vindication, but rather with his own safety. Wiersbe says, "Had Jacob and his family been in Bethel where they belonged, this tragedy might not have occurred." (op. Cit., page 65)

Vengeance is not ours to disseminate. We are called to be a people of peace and retribution belongs to the Lord. Simeon and Levi made some serious mistakes here, and they will get theirs in due course.

Summary

Here are some things I see as we conclude, and you can add your thoughts to your own list.

- 1) When God tells you to do something, don't delay. Get right on it.

2) Being as Oswald Chambers calls "amateur providences" will never work.

God did not leave judgment to you to enact. He will do it.

3) If you are born again, you should live differently than you used to live.

Dear friends, we have eternal life due to the Saviour Y'shua, due to His love and forgiveness. His Resurrection has proven His new covenant. His teaching is great, and yet it goes well beyond that to His life and death. No amount of good works will give us enough information to help us overcome evil. No amount of information will help us overcome our own evil inclination. Only the messiah can repair our relationship with God, which will in turn give us pleasure with Him.

If you have never experienced this eternal and new life about which we are speaking, if you are yet outside the relationship with God, then pray with me. If you haven't yet been restored into fellowship with Him, do so today. Won't you pray this prayer and ask God to forgive you of your sins, whatever they might be, and come home to pleasure with God? Lord forgive me in the name of the Messiah, the Serpent Bruiser, Y'shua himself. Forgive me for all my sins, and make me clean again. Give me eternal life in the name of Y'shua and make me born again. I trust you.