

# That is the Question

- <sup>1</sup> And Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land.
- <sup>2</sup> And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite [some manuscripts have "Horite"], the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humiliated her.
- <sup>3</sup> And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her.
- <sup>4</sup> So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this girl for my wife."
- <sup>5</sup> Now Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah. But his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came.
- <sup>6</sup> And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him.
- <sup>7</sup> The sons of Jacob had come in from the field as soon as they heard of it, and the men were indignant and very angry, because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing must not be done.
- <sup>8</sup> But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him to be his wife.
- <sup>9</sup> Make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves.
- <sup>10</sup> You shall dwell with us, and the land shall be open to you. Dwell and trade in it, and get property in it."
- <sup>11</sup> Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give.
- <sup>12</sup> Ask me for as great a bride price and gift as you will, and I will give whatever you say to me. Only give me the young woman to be my wife."
- <sup>13</sup> The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah.
- <sup>14</sup> They said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us.
- <sup>15</sup> Only on this condition will we agree with you-- that you will become as we are by every male among you being circumcised.
- <sup>16</sup> Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to

ourselves, and we will dwell with you and become one people.  
17 But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter, and we will be gone."  
18 Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem.  
19 And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most honored of all his father's house.  
20 So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying,  
21 "These men are at peace with us; let them dwell in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters as wives, and let us give them our daughters.  
22 Only on this condition will the men agree to dwell with us to become one people-- when every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised.  
23 Will not their livestock, their property and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us."  
24 And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.  
25 On the third day, when they were sore, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city while it felt secure and killed all the males.  
26 They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went away.  
27 The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister.  
28 They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field.  
29 All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and plundered.  
30 Then **Jacob said to Simeon and Levi**, "You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. My numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household."  
31 But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?"

---

### Genesis 34:1-31

---

## What Do We Do With This?

Sometimes a story comes along that makes you wish you didn't choose to preach through Genesis verse by verse. Such a passage is before us today. It is a gruesome and grotesque tale of sex and violence: rape, defilement, humiliation, disgrace, forced captivity, outrage, deceit, mutilation, butchering, murder, plundering, cowardice, and fear. It is so offensive to sensibilities that some commentators skip over the whole story altogether.<sup>1</sup> **Arthur Pink** simply says, “We pass over the sad record of the intervening chapter, asking our readers to turn to it for themselves.”<sup>2</sup> Others, while mentioning it, have no idea how it should or even could be preached. **H. C. Leupold**, in the section entitled “Homiletical Suggestions” says: “We may well wonder if any man who had proper discernment ever drew a text from this chapter ... it is an invaluable sidelight on the lives of the patriarchs. It is rightly evaluated by the more mature mind and *could* be treated to advantage before a *men's* Bible class. But we cannot venture to offer homiletical [i.e. preaching] suggestions.”<sup>3</sup> In other

---

<sup>1</sup> See Alexander Maclaren, *Exposition of Holy Scripture* and Arthur Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis*, as noted by James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 829.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Walkington Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2005), 302. In this book, the only other chapters that Pink skips are 18-19, 23-25, and 50.

<sup>3</sup> H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 2:912. As cited by Boice, 829.

words, “I have no idea how you should preach this.” So how should we approach it? How should we think about it? How would you preach it?

From these examples, it is clear that people today are not quite sure what to do with our story. But long ago, the same thing may have been true. Written sometime in the second century B.C., the book of **Jubilees** contains about 80% of the book of Genesis. The so-called “Little Genesis” is so old that Jesus would have had access to it, if he wanted to read it. This book is a kind of theological interpretation and retelling of Genesis. It recounts our story today.

In it we learn the following (see [comparison chart at the end of the sermon](#)). First, **Dinah**, the daughter of Jacob, was **snatched away** to the house of Shechem, son of Hamor, the Hivite, the ruler of the land. He then **lay with her** and defiled her, even though she was little, only twelve years old (**Jub 30:2**). After begging his father and her brothers that she be given to him as a wife, **Jacob and his sons became very angry** at the men of Shechem. Therefore, they went to the men of that city and spoke treacherously with them and defrauded them and seduced them (**30:3**). No information is given as to how or what they did. Suddenly, **Simeon and Levi** (two sons of Leah and Jacob)

enter the city and execute judgment upon all the men of Shechem, killing every man they found. It says that they killed everyone “painfully” because they had polluted Dinah, their sister (4). Then, they rescued Dinah who had been taken captive and pillaged all of the sheep and oxen and all of the goods of the city and brought it all to Jacob (24). When Jacob found out, he spoke to his sons and became afraid because of the revenge that other Canaanites and Perizzites in the land might exact upon him. But the terror of the Lord came upon those cities and they did not rise up to pursue the sons of Jacob. It concludes with a moral: Let nothing like this be done in Israel to defile a daughter of Israel because judgment was ordered in heaven against them that they should all be destroyed with the sword (5). The Lord handed them over into the hand of the sons of Jacob so that nothing like this might ever happen again (6).

Comparing this story with the biblical account, several things are immediately apparent. First, it reminds me of something my friend Brian Godawa is in the middle of doing with his series of books on the Nephilim. Because he has received several comments from people that they love the books but can't recommend them to their children

because of the amount of violence and sex, he has decided to modify the existing series and turn them all into children's versions of the books. Similarly, the writer of Jubilees, while telling the story sort-of, actually skips over many of the sordid details found in the Genesis account, especially the specific actions of Levi and Simeon towards the men of Shechem.

Second, the story of Jubilees turns the biblical account into a kind of morality tale. It says that the reason this event occurred was to be a lesson that God will not tolerate such behavior. In fact, the majority of the story as it appears in Jubilees is actually extra-biblical reflection on three topics that are, at best, only implicit in the biblical story (eleven verses on laws prohibiting marriage with foreigners, three verses on breaching covenants, and three verses on how, because of his actions here, God chose Levi to be the origin of the Jewish priesthood).<sup>4</sup>

Third, and finally, the author of Jubilees has this amazing way of making all of the Jewish people look innocent and/or righteous. Dinah is just a little girl who was, by no fault of her own, snatched away and defiled.

---

<sup>4</sup> All three are probably valid. I even use the last one on Jacob to help explain how Jews understood the origin of the so-called "covenant with Levi." See Douglas Van Dorn, *Waters of Creation: A Biblical-Theological Study of Baptism*.

Jacob is full of righteous anger the moment he hears about the event. Simeon, and especially Levi, “... did righteousness and uprightness and vengeance against the sinners and it was written down for a blessing” (23).

I have no problem coming to theological conclusions or making theological applications about things, **I will do that in this sermon**. But I use and will continue to use Jubilees today as an example of how people just don't know what to do with stories like this one, even if some of the things done with it are legitimate. If they deal with it at all, they change great portions to make it fit their own sensibilities perhaps thinking, “**We couldn't possibly retell that story that way, now could we?**”

What I want to do this morning is first look at the story as it comes to us from the biblical account in Genesis. Then, I want us to think about how we are to deal with things like **sex and violence in stories** and what **the purpose** of the story before us here today is and how Jubilees' applications of **morality** and the **portrayal of God's people** fit into this. Let's turn to the story.

## **Genesis 34**

The story we are looking at now is in Genesis 34. It begins a **new episode in the life of Jacob**. It takes place

sometime after Jacob arrives back in Canaan with his entire family, probably not long after Jacob and Esau part company.<sup>5</sup> He has eleven boys and at least one daughter. They are of an unknown age to us, for the story does not tell us exactly when the events here take place. The main actors in this story are: **Dinah**, **Shechem**, his father **Hamor**, **Jacob**, **Simeon**, and **Levi**. Curiously (especially in light of past stories of great sin in Genesis), God is altogether absent.

We can divide it up into **four scenes**:

1. Shechem rapes Dinah, then seeks to marry her (**Gen 34:1-4**).
2. Hamor and Shechem propose a marriage alliance with Jacob (**34:5-19**). This section includes the reaction of Jacob and his

---

<sup>5</sup> **Going Deeper:** Thus, the foreshadowing in **Gen 33:18-19**. In terms of the ages of the children, Jubilees says that Dinah is 12 years old. She is born near the end of the birth cycle in Genesis 30, just prior to Joseph. The total time between marrying Leah and Rachel and Leaving Haran is approximately thirteen years, for Jacob works seven years for Rachel and gets married, works seven more years, and then six more years after that. Given this information, then there are probably not more than 10-12 years between Dinah and the oldest son Reuben. If Jubilees is correct, then the oldest Reuben could be at this time is 24 or so, with Simeon and Levi having to be each at least 2-3 years younger than that. 20 year old men would certainly have enough strength to do what it says these boys did here in this story. Given that Joseph is not yet born, Jubilees may very well be correct about the age of Dinah, and this story would seem to take place fairly soon after Jacob leaves Esau (but see Claus Westermann, *A Continental Commentary: Genesis 12–36* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995], 537, who believes this story is quite a bit later than I'm suggesting here). Nevertheless, Scripture leaves the exacting timing of the story undecided and the impact this has is important (see below).

sons to this proposal.

3. Hamor and Shechem speak to the people of the town about the agreement (34:20-24).
4. Simeon and Levi massacre the men of the town and then have a confrontation with their father Jacob (Gen 25-31).

## Scene One

The **first scene** opens with Dinah, the daughter of Leah (Gen 34:1). Dinah is the **seventh born** child of Leah, the **unloved wife** of Jacob, having six older brothers: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. Then it says that she “**went out to see the women of the land**” (1). This strange phrase sounds pretty innocent, but what does it mean? Just here, think again of Jubilees. No mention is made of Dinah doing anything. Rather, she is basically kidnapped at the young and innocent age of twelve. But Genesis doesn't give us an age, and it does say that Dinah was doing something. It may be innocent, or it may not be.

The **Law of Hammurabi 141** describes a housewife who conducts herself improperly with a related word to the one used here.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the Targum describes a prostitute in similar ways to this, as a woman who **goes out in the**

---

<sup>6</sup> See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 310.

countryside or who was at the place on the way where eyes look (Gen 38:21 PsJ). So which women did Dinah go out to see anyway, and what was she doing with them? The phrase is deliberately ambiguous. The point is not necessarily to say that she was doing anything wrong, but neither can we say that she is necessarily an innocent bystander, just minding her own business. Jubilees, perhaps understanding that something bad is being implied here, altogether ignores that she did anything, thereby making her appear as innocent.<sup>7</sup> We are going to see a lot more of this before we are finished.

Next, it tells us that Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land saw her, seized her, lay with her, and humiliated her (Gen 34:2).<sup>8</sup> These four verbs describe the process of the sickening rape of Dinah, who may or may not be a little girl. It reminds me of a later

---

<sup>7</sup> Curiously, The Jews taught that Dinah ended up becoming the wife of Job. For a discussion see James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as it was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 413.

<sup>8</sup> **Going Deeper:** In some manuscripts, “Hivite” reads “Horite.” Both tribes were associated with giants in the Bible, but this is true especially of the Horites (see Gen 14:6). For this reason, I chose to include a short discussion of this story in *Giants: Sons of the Gods* (see pages 115-16). This is not to say that either Shechem or Hamor were giants, but it is to say that we cannot rule out the possibility. Certainly, when viewed in the context of the war between the seeds that I detail in that book and the relationship of Hivites and Horites to giants, the actions of Levi and Simeon in this story make the boys shine a little more brightly and righteously. Yet, as said previously, Genesis 34 actually leaves this as an open question.

story, one between a son and daughter of David (Amnon and Tamar), which deliberately echoes the story here, except that one makes Amnon's actions appear even worse than Shechem's. How so?

Amnon, after doing the unspeakable act, ends up hating Tamar (see **2 Sam 13**). But of Shechem it says, “**His soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her**” (**Gen 34:3**). Therefore, the young prince asked his father to “**get this girl for my wife**” (**4**). You are supposed to get the sense that something is simultaneously profoundly and deeply perverted here, while also seeing that Shechem is not as bad as he could be. Dinah has something done to her, but she may not have been entirely innocent. Still, the first four verses of this story leave us gasping for breath at the sin and wickedness that has taken place.

### *Scene Two*

**Scene Two** begins with Jacob hearing of these events, but because his sons are out in the field, he holds his peace until they retire for the evening (**Gen 34:5**). Again, compare this with Jubilees. In the retelling of the story, Jacob and his sons are, together, *immediately* angry. There is

no hesitation on Jacob's part. His reaction is held up as the model of righteousness. But in the biblical version, things are not so clear-cut. Why is Jacob **not immediately outraged here**? Has he learned to seek council before flying off the handle? If so, why did he not go out to find them? Is this the reaction of wisdom? Or, could it be that this is a daughter of his unloved wife and he just really isn't all that concerned? The fact that it says he held his peace does not seem to reflect very positively upon Jacob. The Scripture again leaves the chosen seed, the supposed "good-guy" in **a morally ambiguous light**.

Next, Hamor and Shechem seek out Jacob (**Gen 34:6**). Meanwhile, the sons of Jacob come in from the field and immediately become "**indignant and very angry, because [Shechem] had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing must not be done**" (7). This is the reaction we would have expected Jacob to have.

At this point, I want you to recall just how many similar stories we have seen to this in Genesis.

**Genesis 6:2:**<sup>9</sup> The sons of God "take" the daughters of men. This

---

<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the first reference here should be **Genesis 3:6**: The woman takes the fruit from the

becomes a main reason for the flood.

**Genesis 9:22:** Ham takes Noah's wife.

**Genesis 12:15:** Pharaoh takes Sarai to become his wife.

**Genesis 19:5:** The men of Sodom seek to take the angels and Lot seeks to give them his daughters.

**Genesis 20:2:** Abimelech takes Sarah to be his wife.

**Genesis 26:10:** Abimelech desires to take Rebekah to be his wife.

Of all these stories have in common the **potential pollution of the chosen seed**. In all of them, God has worked so that this would not happen. (Of them, the last one has the most affinities to the present one. In both cases, Gentiles seek to take the chosen women, Isaac and Jacob show little courage towards their women, and there are numerous verbal links as well. Things constantly repeat in Genesis, only they often get worse, and this is part of what should strike us about the present story. I will conclude this morning with some thoughts about this).

At this point, Hamor, who sees the reaction of Jacob's sons, interjects, "**The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him to be his wife**" (**Gen**

---

serpent. As we saw when we studied this passage, there are sexual undercurrents in this story, but Genesis keeps this deliberately vague, therefore, I do not include it here so as not to create unnecessary and unhelpful speculation. Nevertheless, the taking of the fruit in the context of the marriage of Adam and Eve is in some way a kind of precursor to all of this.

34:8). In other words, this is true love. Never mind that little incident where he raped your sister and daughter. Let's move on. "Make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. You shall dwell with us, and the land shall be open to you. Dwell and trade in it, and get property in it" (Jacob already had property in it; cf. Gen 33:19).

What do you make of this? On one level, the text tells us that it was true. Shechem did love Dinah. On another level, this is pure politics. These are not ordinary men, but a king and a prince. This is about making an alliance with a powerful family, one they had to know about from Abraham and Isaac (who is still alive). Do you think they have never heard of the God of the Patriarchs, after all the events we have seen in Genesis? Don't count on it. This is politically savvy.

Rather than focus on this, Jubilees and other Jewish writings take a very keen interest in different things such as the mixing of marriages, something that later would become a very big deal in both the Law of Moses and the Prophets. This certainly has its roots in Genesis and our story does focus on this as it is always in the background of Genesis. This is just where the potential to destroy the

coming chosen seed thought returns.<sup>10</sup> Our story does not do it to the same degree nor in the same explicit way as later books and commentaries will. But the way that it will do this is **shocking to the sensibilities** of both Jew and Christian. It doesn't do it by theologizing about mixed marriages. Rather, it does it through outraging us in a story.

To prepare us for this, Shechem now adds his own two cents: “**Let me find favor** [a word we saw plenty of in the previous story] **in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give. Ask me for as great a bride price and gift as you will, and I will give whatever you say to me. Only give me the young woman to be my wife**” (12). This time it is not big, powerful daddy who is offering a political treaty. It is poor, wretched son—the morally weak princeling who can't keep his pants on, who will one day become the wicked ruler of the region. He tries to convince them that he loves their daughter. Will Jacob and the sons buy it?

We learn that the sons of Jacob “**answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah**” (13). This puts the following actions into, not a righteous category as in Jubilees, but *a sinful one*.

---

<sup>10</sup> We do not know, yet, that Judah is the one through whom the promises will come.

This word “deceit” (*mirmah*) is the word used by Isaac of Jacob (**Gen 27:35**) when he stole the birthright from Esau. Those are the only two times Moses uses it. But it is used a lot in the Psalms and Proverbs. “You destroy those who speak lies; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man” (**Ps 5:6**). “Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry! Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit” (**Ps 17:1**). “The thoughts of the righteous are just; the counsels of the wicked are deceitful” (**Prov 12:5**). The word means to act falsely, deceptively, with dishonesty and with treachery. It is a sin. The brothers believed the ends justified the means. So what did they do?

**First**, they give them an **historical** answer. They told them “We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us” (**Gen 34:14**). They are thinking of the covenant of circumcision that God gave to Abraham (**Gen 17:10-11**). Their words here are true enough.

**Second**, they agree on a **condition**. “Only on this condition will we agree with you—that you will become as we are by every male among you being circumcised. Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to ourselves, and we will dwell with you

and become one people” (15-16). Third, the present an ultimatum. “But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter, and we will be gone” (17). The word “daughter” means that Jacob had to have agreed to this. But the sons were deceitful here. At least, some of them were.

But Hamor and Shechem do not realize this, so it says, “Their words pleased” them (18). I can hardly imagine! Do they have any idea what they have just agreed to do? These are not eight day old babies we are talking about here, and there are no modern hospital or anesthesia. They didn’t even have hard liquor. Maybe some wine and a piece of leather, bite down and bear it. Yet even considering these things, “The young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob’s daughter” (Gen 34:19). Jubilees makes little of Shechem’s love for Dinah, because it is interested in making the Israelites look good and the Gentiles look bad. But Scripture keeps bringing this up, thereby giving us a more ambiguous picture of the bad-guys too.

### *Scene Three*

Next it says, “Now he was the most honored of all his father’s house” (19), and this prepares us for the third scene.

Hamor and Shechem come to the gate of their city and speak to the men of the city (20). Can you imagine? What would you tell them? Well, you need to be a bit political with your own people too I would imagine. You can't just come out and say, "Hey, my little boy really loves this girl, so all of you get to be circumcised immediately."

Instead, they say, "These men are at peace with us; let them dwell in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters as wives, and let us give them our daughters." (This *has* to be Hamor talking now). "Only on this condition will the men agree to dwell with us to become one people—when every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised" (21-22). But this, too, needs some smoothing over, and so this is a classic example of couching the bad news between two pieces of good news. They conclude their argument, "Will not their livestock, their property and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us" (23). Look at all you have to gain from just a few days of pain. And so this, of course, is where the phrase originated then, "No pain, no gain."

What is the result of their impassioned plea? "And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and

his son Shechem” (24). Of course they did! This is the king. Did they really have a choice? “And every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city” (24). Now, if you are a later Jew reading the Mosaic law into all of this, you would probably be thinking, OK, that seems to be right. They have to become Jews. Then they will be regarded by God and it will be OK to share all that they have. This is what Gentiles had to do later on to be considered Jews. But this, of course, is not the end of the story.

## Approaching Stories with Great Sins

### *Scene Four: The Violence*

Finally, the fourth scene begins, “On the third day...” (Gen 34:25). By now, we know enough that when we see this phrase, something important is going to happen. “...when they were sore, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, took their swords and came against the city while it felt secure and killed all the males. They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword...” (25-26). The scene is, well, words don’t do it justice. I can’t even imagine what it would have looked like, nor do I care to. I do know that showing it in a movie would be rated R

or worse, as would the beginning of the story.

Just here, I want to move to a little [application](#) before concluding the story. I'll start by once more using Jubilees as a context. Jubilees gives us none of this detail. We don't know anything about this plot. Not a word is mentioned about circumcision. The scene in our minds is a blank void when we read Jubilees here. What did the boys do, exactly?

Along with lessening the impact of the rape in its telling of the story, this causes me to wonder about how [people deal with what the Scripture actually says](#) in places where we are easily offended. I want to move to the realm of movies for a moment to contextualize in another way how people today deal with sex and violence and other things that cause even good commentators to just skip over stories like this altogether.

**Brain Godawa**, who I mentioned earlier, is a successful Hollywood film writer and director. A decade ago, before I knew him, he came out with a book called *Hollywood Worldviews*. I heard about it when he was interviewed on the *White Horse Inn*. The goal of the book is to help Christians think Christianly about movies, by learning to understand the worldviews and the contexts that shape the stories being made. He starts his *Introduction* with four

quotes:

“Movies corrupt the values of society.”

“Movies have too much sex and violence.”

“Movies are worldly and a waste of time.”

“Movies are dangerous escapist fantasies.”

This is how many people approach movies, and it is how it seems to me that many people approach our story today. The result of this kind of attitude can be what he calls *artistic teetotaling* and *cultural anorexia*. Whether in movies or the Bible, it comes because we are personally uncomfortable with stories like this, let alone letting others like our children read them. It's one thing if it is a movie, I suppose (again, depending on context). But what about God's holy word?

Rather than being offended or sugar-coating it or writing abridged versions that won't offend people, we ought to be asking, “*Why did God see fit to tell the story as he did?*” He had to have a reason, didn't he? What is that reason?

Well, I can assure you the reason isn't just because he wants to shake up and offend some Victorian sense of

prudence and taste that you might have. God does not put sex and violence into his stories simply to be voyeuristic about it. Brian summarizes it in the context of movies, but it fits what I'm thinking of with Scripture very well:

Although violence and sexual immorality are results of the Fall in Eden, not all accounts of sex and violence are intrinsically immoral. It is the *context* through which these misbehaviors are communicated that dictates their destructive or redemptive nature. It is not merely the detailed acts of violence portrayed in teen slasher series like *Friday the 13th*, *Halloween* or *Hostel* that make them detrimental to the minds of youth. It is that these acts exist within a nihilistic view of the world, with murder demythologized through diabolical detail and the existential association of sex with death. The devaluing of human life is realized through evil as entertainment.<sup>11</sup>

The Scripture gives sordid details that the author of Jubilees couldn't bring himself to retell, because, as Brian says in another place, “The depiction of evil is treated as

---

<sup>11</sup> 33.

the necessary prerequisite to understanding redemption.”<sup>12</sup>

If you want to truly understand how great grace is, then you need to truly see how awful sin is. What is the context of these horrible sins and what is it trying to convey?

**First**, the context serves to show that both elect and non-elect families are capable of doing some very, very bad things. By highlighting the nature of the sins, and by refusing to make moral judgments *in the way* that we wish it would make—especially black and white judgments that God’s people can justify their actions while others can’t, the story in Genesis actually impresses us that “*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” “*There is no one who does good, no not one.*” The way it is written, everyone can be sympathized with on some level, and everyone can be viewed as guilty of something. The Scripture is not doing this to exploit sex and violence, and the many other sins here, but just the opposite.

It does this partly through ambiguity. Why does the Bible in this story so consistently put God’s people in an ambiguous light. For that matter, why does it make us sympathize at least a little with the Gentiles at Shechem? Jubilees only makes heroes out of God’s people, while

---

<sup>12</sup> 33.

making villains out of the people of Shechem. Why do we feel the need to do this when the Bible itself does not?

Perhaps it is our impulse to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, while moralizing the story with clear-cut Aesop's Fables kinds of lessons: Be like Jacob; be like Dinah; hate evil godless people even if it means killing them to get justice; etc. It is difficult to live with moral tension, especially when we think that this is the main point of the story and when that moral tension might just reveal something bad about us. While it is certainly true that the actions in this story—that is the actions of rape, deceit, cowardice, murder, and the like are stark and clear, obviously evil, the circumstances surrounding these actions are muddied and gray.

To see this most clearly, let us look at the end of the story. **Vs. 30** has Jacob approaching his sons afterward. He says, “You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. My numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household.” Jacob is concerned with the punishment that will come upon them all because of their sin. Jacob sees it as black and white. The verse itself causes

us to think of the promise of God and his Word to keep the chosen seed alive.

### *Scene Four: The Question*

But **vs. 31** is much more ambiguous. We see that the story ends, not with a moral lesson, but with a question. This is very rare in Scripture when it comes to telling stories. Perhaps the most famous place this occurs is the last verse of **Jonah**. The whole book is about how God will take the gospel to the Gentiles, even if the prophet doesn't like it. Jonah gets angry at God when he takes away his shade, which acted as an object lesson in getting things you don't deserve. In response, rather than preach a sermon to Jonah, God simply leaves it all hanging with a question, “**And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?**” (**Jonah 4:11**).

Our story likewise ends with a question. “**But they said, ‘Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?’**” Like Jonah, the answer is rhetorical. Of course not! Unlike Jonah, their question is an attempt to justify their sin. Rather than trying to justify Levi and Simeon, Dinah and Jacob in this story, which is our temptation; rather than

retell the story in our own image; perhaps we simply ought to think long and hard about all that we have seen here. How can people be so vile, so ruthless, so deceitful, and so violent? Is it right to act that way? Is it OK to repay evil with evil, to seek revenge, even upon innocent people? With no definitive answer given by the Scripture, this leads us to ask, if God isn't making a direct moral application here, then what is the point of the story?

I think it is this. This story is deliberately ambiguous in order to cause in your mind certain reactions. God doesn't mind making you uncomfortable for a while, for that is often how he ends up teaching you something. In this, he partly wants you to think about the nature of God's people. Far from being perfect, they continue to sin, even while trying to do the right thing. Therefore, the point here cannot be to emulate them. Rather, the point has to be about God in some way. Yet, **God is not in this story at all.**

Two things come to mind here. First, God's absence is actually critical, because when he is absent, as we have seen throughout Genesis, God's people sin. This nature of the sin in this story causes us to see that far from getting better, without God, **people actually get worse.** Yet, they often do

it in these crazy ways of justifying themselves on the spiritual level. “See, our murder of that whole city is irrelevant, because they treated our sister like a prostitute.” Rather than self-justification, what we need is God’s special presence in order to curb our sin and sanctify us by his Spirit. And we need repentance and humility with ourselves. It isn’t that your friend sitting next to you needs to be more humble, because he’s so evil. You do. You and I are God’s people.

Second, God’s absence is not the result of a Deity who doesn’t care about his people. Rather, it is [a sign](#) to them that unless they turn to him for help, their lives result in things like this. Unless they are humble themselves and seek his face, unless they are constantly looking to him to be their Lord, they will inevitably take things into their own hands. The results are usually disastrous.

Finally, even though God is absent—and this will be made much more clear in the next chapter when he comes again—God is still sovereign over the life of Israel. He will not let harm come to his people, thereby destroying his own promise to eventually send the coming Seed of Christ. No matter what they do, he will bring his promises to pass. God has kept his promise, and the Lord Jesus came near to

us—God in human flesh, to do what we ourselves in our flesh were weak and unable to do. He paid the penalty that our sins deserve, so that by faith in him, we might be reconciled to a God we have offended.

It cost him everything. It costs you nothing, except humility. Yet, in this story, we are left to wonder and contemplate what life apart from him eventually looks like. Do you think that picture is worth risking a life apart from saving faith in Christ?

Genesis 33-18-34:31	Jubilees 30:1-25
<p><sup>33:18</sup> And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram, and he camped before the city...</p>	<p><sup>30<sup>1</sup></sup> And in the first year of the sixth week he went up to Salem, which is east of Shechem, in peace in the fourth month.</p>
<p><sup>34:1</sup> And Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, <b>went out to see the women of the land.</b></p>	<p><sup>2a</sup> And there Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, <b>was snatched away</b> to the house of Shechem, son of Hamor, the Hivite, the ruler of the land.</p>
<p><sup>2</sup> And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite (or Horite), the prince of the land, <b>saw her, he seized her</b> and <b>lay</b> with her and <b>humiliated</b> her.</p>	<p><sup>2b</sup> And he lay with her and defiled her, but she was little, <b>only twelve years old.</b></p>
<p><sup>3</sup> And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her.  <sup>4</sup> So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this girl for my wife."</p>	<p><sup>3a</sup> And he begged his father and her brothers that she be given to him as a wife,</p>
<p><sup>5</sup> Now Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah. But his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came.  <sup>6</sup> And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him.  <sup>7</sup> The sons of Jacob had come in from the field as soon as they heard of it, and the men were indignant and very angry, because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing must not be done.  <sup>8</sup> But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him to be his wife.</p>	<p><sup>3b</sup> but <b>Jacob</b> and his sons were <b>angry</b> at the men of Shechem because they defiled Dinah, their sister.</p>
<p><sup>9</sup> Make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves.  <sup>10</sup> You shall dwell with us, and the land shall be open to you. Dwell and trade in it, and get property in it."  <sup>11</sup> Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give.  <sup>12</sup> Ask me for as great a bride price and gift as you will, and I will give whatever you say to me. Only give me the young woman to be my wife."</p>	<p><sup>7</sup> And if there is any man in Israel who wishes to give his daughter or his sister to any man who is from the seed of the gentiles, let him surely die, and let him be stoned because he has caused shame in Israel. And also the woman will be burned with fire because she has defiled the name of her father's house and so she will be uprooted from Israel.  <sup>8</sup> And do not let an adulteress or defilement be found in Israel all of the days of the generations of the earth because Israel is holy to the Lord. And let any man who causes defilement surely die, let him be stoned  <sup>9</sup> because thus it is decreed and written in the heavenly tablets concerning all of the seed of Israel: "Let anyone who causes defilement surely die. And let him be stoned."  <sup>10</sup> And there is no limit of days for this law. And there is no remission or forgiveness except that the man who caused defilement of his daughter will be rooted out from the midst of all Israel because he has given some of his seed to Moloch and sinned so as to defile it.  <sup>11</sup> And you, Moses, command the children of Israel and exhort them not to give any of their daughters to the gentiles and not to take for their sons any of the daughters of the gentiles because that is contemptible before the Lord.  <sup>12</sup> Therefore I have written for you in the words of the law all of the deeds of the Shechemites which they did against Dinah and how the sons of Jacob spoke, saying, "We will not give our daughter to a man who is uncircumcised because that is a reproach to us."  <sup>13</sup> And it is a reproach to Israel, to those who give and those who</p>

take any of the daughters of the gentile nations because it is a defilement and it is contemptible to Israel.

<sup>14</sup>And Israel will not be cleansed from this defilement if there is in it a woman from the daughters of gentiles or one who has given any of his daughters to a man who is from any of the gentiles.

<sup>15</sup>For there will be plague upon plague and curse upon curse, and every judgment, and plague, and curse will come. And if he does this thing, or if he blinds his eyes from those who cause defilement and from those who defile the sanctuary of the Lord and from those who profane his holy name, then all of the people will be judged together on account of all of the defilement and the profaning of this one.

<sup>16</sup>And there is no accepting of person or regarding appearance or taking from his hand either fruit or sacrifice or holocaust or fat or the aroma of sweet-smelling sacrifice so that he might accept it. And let any man or woman in Israel who defiled his sanctuary be dealt with likewise.

<sup>17</sup>Therefore I command you, saying, “Proclaim this testimony to Israel: ‘See how it was for the Shechemites and their sons, how they were given into the hand of the two children of Jacob and they killed them painfully. And it was a righteousness for them and it was written down for them for righteousness.’”

<sup>18</sup>And the seed of Levi was chosen for the priesthood and levitical orders to minister before the Lord always just as we do. And Levi and his sons will be blessed forever because he was zealous to do righteousness and judgment and vengeance against all who rose up against Israel.

<sup>19</sup>And thus a blessing and righteousness will be written on high as a testimony for him in the heavenly tablets before the God of all.

<sup>20</sup>And we will remember for a thousand generations the righteousness which a man did during his life in all of the appointed times of the year. And it will be written on high and it will come to him and his descendants after him. And he will be written down as a friend and a righteous one in the heavenly tablets.

<sup>21</sup>All of these words I have written for you, and I have commanded you to speak to the children of Israel that they might not commit sin or transgress the ordinances or break the covenant which was ordained for them so that they might do it and be written down as friends.

<sup>22</sup>But if they transgress and act in all the ways of defilement, they will be recorded in the heavenly tablets as enemies. And they will be blotted out of the book of life and written in the book of those who will be destroyed and with those who will be rooted out from the land.

<sup>23</sup>And on the day that the children of Jacob killed Shechem he wrote on high for them a book in heaven that they did righteousness and uprightness and vengeance against the sinners and it was written down for a blessing.

<sup>13</sup> The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah.

<sup>14</sup> They said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a **disgrace** to

<sup>3c</sup>And so they spoke treacherously with them and defrauded them and seduced them.

<p>us.</p> <p><sup>15</sup> Only on this condition will we agree with you-- that you will become as we are by every male among you being circumcised.</p> <p><sup>16</sup> Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to ourselves, and we will dwell with you and become one people.</p> <p><sup>17</sup> But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter, and we will be gone."</p> <p><sup>18</sup> Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem.</p> <p><sup>19</sup> And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most honored of all his father's house.</p> <p><sup>20</sup> So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying,</p> <p><sup>21</sup> "These men are at peace with us; let them dwell in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters as wives, and let us give them our daughters.</p> <p><sup>22</sup> Only on this condition will the men agree to dwell with us to become one people-- when every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised.</p> <p><sup>23</sup> Will not their livestock, their property and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us."</p> <p><sup>24</sup> And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.</p>	
<p><sup>25</sup> On the third day, when they were sore, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city while it felt secure and killed all the males.</p> <p><sup>26</sup> They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went away.</p> <p><sup>27</sup> The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister.</p> <p><sup>28</sup> They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field.</p> <p><sup>29</sup> All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and plundered.</p>	<p><sup>4</sup> And Simeon and Levi entered Shechem suddenly. And they executed judgment upon all of the men of Shechem and killed every man they found therein and did not leave in it even one. They killed everyone painfully because they had polluted Dinah, their sister.</p> <p><sup>24</sup> And they brought forth Dinah, their sister, from the house of Shechem and they took captive everything which was in Shechem: their sheep and their oxen and their asses and all their herds and all their goods. And they brought forth everything to Jacob, their father.</p>
<p><sup>30</sup> Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. My numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household."</p> <p><sup>31</sup> But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?"</p>	<p><sup>25a</sup> And he spoke with them because they slaughtered the citizens, for he was afraid of those who inhabited the land: the Canaanites and the Perizzites.</p> <p><sup>25a</sup> But the terror of the Lord was in all of the cities which surrounded Shechem and they did not rise up to pursue the sons of Jacob because a dread had fallen upon them (see Gen 35:5).</p> <p><sup>5</sup> And therefore let nothing like this be done henceforth to defile a daughter of Israel because the judgment was ordered in heaven against them that they might annihilate with a sword all of the men of Shechem because they caused a shame in Israel.</p> <p><sup>6</sup> And the Lord handed them over into the hand of the sons of Jacob so that they might destroy them with the sword and execute judgment against them, and so that nothing like this might therefore happen in Israel to defile an Israelite virgin.</p>