

Some years ago I distributed in this church a plan for reading the Old Testament story... about one chapter a day.

Some daily readings I put an asterisk by, warning the reader that the text involved some difficult questions.

Some texts earned a double asterisk, indicating that you ought to read it yourself before you decide to read it to your children.

This is one of those double asterisk texts. I'll do my best to make the message PG.

One of the things I like so much about the Bible is that it deals with life as it is.

At times we find the heroic and uplifting.

At times we find the mundane.

At other times in the Bible we see life in all its disgraceful awfulness.

It is at these moments in reading the Bible that we learn something very important... for reading the Bible and for living life.

### **Look for lessons even in tragedy.**

Disgraceful tragedy always teaches lessons if we are willing to learn.

This is difficult, because often they are lessons that we are resistant to or reluctant to learn.

We are in the midst of the Jacob story in Genesis.

We met Jacob in chapter 25 when he swindled his brother out of his birthright.

He then stole his brother's blessing and had to flee for his life.

After 20 years in Haran he is now back in the land where he is supposed to be, the land promised to him by God.

But God is at work, changing him, teaching him about God... that the Lord is faithful to His promise.

Jacob is learning to live in light of God and His promise to him.

But in this chapter, God is not mentioned even once. There is a lesson in that fact alone.

There are lessons in the behavior of the people in the story.

There are lessons in how this story fits into the context of what God is doing for Jacob, for Israel.

Remember that this story was originally written to the people of Israel in the wilderness after they were rescued from Egypt.

They were supposed to learn from it... and so shall we.

### **Read Gen. 34:1-31**

Three disparate lessons that come from this story in its Biblical context:

#### **I. Lesson about us: Sin wreaks havoc on human relationships.**

In every case in this chapter as we see the sinful behavior unfold, everyone thinks what they are doing is fine.

This is an important lesson in and of itself.

It is the nature of most sinful behavior. You think it is not a problem. But it is.

We've already learned in Genesis that sin involves the arrogance of choosing to do other than what God says to do.

Sin wrecks our relationship with God and brings a curse into our lives.

Now we get to see like never before just how sin destroys our relationships with people around us.

The sin of Shechem: He took what he wanted because he could... and he thought he could keep living that way.

He took advantage of Dinah, because he could, and then tried to treat her like he loved her.

He insisted that his father help him to get her for him as a wife.

Then he insisted to the others of this little city, think 2000 people (Beresford), that they all do what he says.

Apparently, Shechem, with this city named after him, was a fairly powerful guy. He was used to getting what he wanted.

He was a bully. This is what bullies do. This is what power over people can do to you.

You see it today all the time... in politicians, in athletes, in performers, in bosses, at work, at school.

Do you have power over people? How do you use it? To get what you want?

The sin of Hamor: He supported his son, right or wrong.

After all, what was he going to do? Insist on justice? Punish his son?

That would be difficult. He might suffer. The family might look bad.

He behaves the way most families behave... most families around here!

You cover the sins of your family, rather than confrontation and confession of sin... you cover it up and hope it goes away.

It does not go away. Sin never meekly dissipates... it works its destruction on the person and then the family.

Do you see sin in your family? Confront the person or persons. Get help if you need it. Secret sin is terribly destructive.

The sin of Jacob: He did nothing... absolutely nothing and was then upset about what happened.

Jacob sits silently. He does not pray. He does not speak, until the very end. He fails to guide his sons.

And, as children do, they really need guidance.

A word to fathers: In our society fathers are encouraged to be lazy leaders.

When the wife needs to be loved and led, the husband is not around. He's doing what he wants.

When the children need guidance and discipline, the father sits and does nothing. That is easier.

When the TV needs to be turned off, the father sits and watches. It takes less effort.

When the teenager listens to sick music, dad is intimidated and does not call it what it is.

When the family needs to go to church or read the Bible, dad takes the easy way and just lets things go as they are.

Men, don't be a wimpy leader for your family.

The sin of Jacob's sons: They sought vengeance when they should have sought justice.

They are angry, and rightfully so, but they let their anger control them and make them sin.

They are driven by revenge, causing destruction to Shechem and all his people... not justice, nor care for Dinah.

I see this happen to people as well.

Have you ever been so angry at someone that whenever you think about them you just want them to suffer?

It is not a good place to be. Don't stay in that uncontrollable angry state.

You will think you have a right to your anger.

You will be fearful that if you let go of your anger that person will not suffer enough.

But, it is not your place to cause pain, to carry out vengeance. You need to seek right justice, and forgive.

And, if you have been captive to anger for some time, you probably need help knowing what this even means.

Sin twists our minds so that we cannot think rightly.

"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." (James 5:16)

There is a second lesson about the sin of Jacob's sons. It gets passed on.

Notice the nature of the excessive vengeance that Jacob's sons carry out.

Their plan is characterized by deception... where did they learn that from? Their father, mother, even their grandmother.

We pass our sins on to our children. I hate the thought, but it's true. We see it throughout the Bible.

All the more reason to deal with our sin as soon as possible. Kill it before it kills your family.

## II. Lesson about the world: The world wants to assimilate you.

Here we take a good look at the motive of the Shechemites.

Why did the men of the city agree to be circumcised? Why did they go along with the plan of Jacob's sons?

Well, we find the answer in vs. 21-23.

They thought that their plan would make these people of God's promise become one of them.

They thought that eventually all of Jacob's possessions would become theirs.

They thought that they would intermarry and become one people... that Jacob's family would become like them.

This is a warning to those Israelites in the wilderness under Moses who were about to come into the promised land.

They were supposed to be different and stay different and not become like all the other peoples around them.

They were supposed to not worship the idols of the peoples, to be set apart for God.

But, the world does not want the people of God to be different. The world wants us to be the same as everyone in it.

This is why Paul writes in Rom. 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

"conformed" = made to fit, like plastic into a mold. And this world offers many molds, forms to be pushed into:

athlete mold, scholar mold, popular mold, rebel mold, thespian mold, gang banger mold, Goth mold, hip hop mold, sportsman mold, Miley Cyrus mold, Justin Bieber mold... trying to be like some celebrity or athlete...

You know what worldly mold attracts you.

"transformed" = changed by God from the inside out into the righteousness of Christ

Are you being pushed into some mold of the world?

Or, are you allowing God to transform you from the inside out?

## III. Lesson about God: God remains faithful even when we are faithless.

We understand this lesson from the context of this whole story... and maybe it is the most important lesson.

We find this story of family tragedy and misbehavior right between two stories of God's promise keeping faithfulness.

chs. 31-33 Jacob flees from Laban and God rescues him, hears his prayer, wrestles him, blesses him and rescues him from Esau.

ch. 35 God speaks to Jacob again and Jacob learns to worship God alone. Then **Gen. 35:9-12**

You see? The mess of Jacob's family and Jacob's failure to lead them rightly did not cause God to say, "Forget it, I'm done."

Why? Because God keeps his promises.

Maybe this is the principle theme of the whole book of Genesis. God keeps His promises. God is faithful to His promise to us.

This may be the principle reason the God through Moses included this story here in Genesis.

For Israel was a nation that would over and over show that they failed to listen to God, follow God, to obey God.

Israel's history as a people would turn out to be filled with disgraceful tragedy that they would bring on themselves.

Their leaders would be irresponsible. The people of Israel would be unfaithful.

They needed to know that their God is faithful even when they are not.

THAT is why God answers Moses as He does in **Ex. 3:13-15**.

What does it mean for God to say "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?" He does this over and over in the Bible.

Does it mean that God is the God of heroic, courageous, wise people? No.

It means that God remains the God of the people to whom He makes promises even when they are faithless, cowardly, or stupid.

Is God your God? Are you believing in Him? Are you clinging to the promise He has made to you in Jesus Christ?

Is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob your God? If He is I tell you this with complete confidence.

He will never leave you nor forsake you. (Heb. 13:5) He will surely keep His promise to you.

He will not let you go when you sin and disappoint him.

He will not leave you when you fall to your addiction or when you do something incredibly foolish.

He will not leave you when you struggle to believe that He will not leave you. **2 Tim. 3:11-13**