

Genesis Bible Study 19

The Family Honor

taken from

Salvation for the Social Order: For Those Who Haven't Read the Bible and for Those Who Think Religion is Merely a Private Matter

by Philip E. Friesen

Reading: Genesis 34

Notes

This story will help you understand the dynamics of family life when Leah's first four sons had grown. Remember that the interaction between these twelve brothers shaped the character of the People of Israel. You will understand Israel's family better if you read Genesis 34 and 38, even if they are not discussed in your group.

However you may feel about Israel's family at this point, remember, the story is not yet finished.

Discussion

1. How do you feel about Dinah? Which of the following apply? Was she:
 - A bad girl?
 - A stupid girl?
 - A neglected child without adequate supervision?
 - An innocent victim?
2. How do you feel about Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi? Were they:
 - Brave and loyal brothers?
 - Terrorists?
 - Something in between?
3. What benefits did Hamor and Shechem see for themselves in a marriage with Jacob's family?¹
4. How do you feel about marriages arranged for financial or political advantage?
5. What did Jacob's sons say would be their basic requirements?² What does this say about their value system?
6. Discuss the family dynamics.
7. Who are the leaders among Jacob's sons?
8. In the culture of Jacob's time, which is more valued, truth or honor? Which is more valued in your culture, truth or honor?

¹ Basically they were looking for economic advantages.

² Jacob's family emphasized their own cultural and spiritual values.

Cultural and Historical Notes

In the culture of this time, a man who raped a virgin was required to marry her, often without the option of divorce later on. In addition he would have to pay whatever bride price the father of the girl demanded. Customs varied, but in Israel the father of the girl could accept the money as a penalty, and still refuse to give his daughter in marriage.

Jacob did not have this option. Jacob was a stranger, and the rapist was the son of the chief of the Hivites. Furthermore, Dinah was still captive in Hamor's house. When Hamor and Shechem came to visit Jacob, they did not apologize. They simply came to negotiate the price for what they had already taken. Their words were polite, but they hoped to absorb Jacob's family and its wealth into their community.

In response, Jacob's sons made clear that their first consideration was religious and not economic. A male child was offered to God by circumcision. This made each son a member of God's community, and unified the culture with the same religious values. They would only intermarry with people who were similarly devoted to God.

Hamor and Shechem had no problem adding another God to their system; so long as it meant more wealth and power for them. Even though the ceremony of circumcision was inconvenient and painful, Hamor, as chief, was able to convince the men of the town to agree.

For Jacob's sons, the only way to get their sister back, as they saw it, was to kill her captors, and that is what they did.