

Messianic Rabbi: Are We Killing Those We Welcome Into Covenant?

As we read through our Bibles, there are times when we come to an event or narrative that seems as if it is disconnected from all the text around it, as if the story were somehow filed out of place.

This week, as I was reading once more about Jacob and Esau, I came upon one of these “drop in” stories: the story of the rape of Dinah found in Genesis 34. If we read Chapter 33 and then skip to Chapter 35, with the exception of traveling back to Beth El, the story of Jacob continues fluidly.

In other words, we could read the story of Jacob without stopping for this single horrible event. Yet G-D, in His wisdom, felt this event was necessary to include at this time in the text. Please remember that there were millions of events that took place in the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that are not included in the text, so if this was included, then we know G-D knew we needed to read about it.

It is also important, as we read through Genesis 34, we realize that no one in this chapter is behaving correctly. The chapter starts out:

“Now Dinah, Leah’s daughter whom she bore for Jacob, went out to look at the daughters of the land” (Gen. 34:1, TLV).

There is a strong hint in this verse that may be overlooked but is vital to our understanding. Notice the language Dinah went out to look at the daughters of the land. Dinah was a daughter of Jacob and a part of the children of Israel.

Why was she going out and looking at the daughters of the

world? The daughters of the world should have been looking at her. And before we judge her too unkindly, let's take a moment to note just how much the people of G-D are trying to "go out" and "look at" the world today. Let's continue reading:

"When Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he took her and lay with her and raped her. But his soul clung to Dinah, Jacob's daughter, and he loved the young woman and spoke reassuringly to the young woman. So Shechem said to his father Hamor saying, 'Get me this girl for a wife'" (Gen. 34:2-4).

Shechem sees Dinah and desires her. He takes her, lays down with her and rapes her. But as we read on, the text says he loved her. How can he be a rapist one moment and a loving man speaking reassuringly the next? It is also interesting that Shechem goes to his father and tells him that he wants to marry Dinah. To us in the time we live, none of Shechem's actions make sense.

But, if you were to place yourself into the culture of Shechem, he would have seen no sin in his actions. Why? Because in his culture, his actions were the norm. Stick with me, please, as we go on.

In verses 5-12, Jacob and his sons hear of Dinah's rape by Shechem and Hamor, and Shechem visits Jacob and his sons in an attempt to arrange a marriage, including offering a large dowry. Then, we reach Genesis 34:13-16:

"But Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully as they spoke, because he had defiled their sister Dinah. They said to them, 'We can't do this thing—give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised—for this is a disgrace to us. Only by this will we consent to you: if you will become like us, by circumcising every male. Then we'll give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves, and live with you, and become one people.'"

As we read these verses, we see that Dinah's brothers have purposely chosen to be deceitful, while Shechem and his father were trying to act rightly (according to their culture). The brothers say, "If you enter the covenant of Abraham through circumcision, you will become like us and we will let you marry our sister." But, while they fully intended to let them become circumcised, they had no intent of letting them become a part of the covenant people of G-D, as we see from their actions in Genesis 25-26:

"Then on the third day while they were in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came against the city undisturbed and killed every male. Hamor and his son Shechem they killed with the sword, then took Dinah from Shechem's house and left."

Just think about how awful this entire chapter is. In most biblical stories, there are good guys and bad guys. There is a clear lesson for us to learn from this event. But, in this narrative, we only see people behaving badly, starting with Dinah, all the way through the way her brothers murdered the men of Shechem.

So, you may be asking yourself, "Why is this story here? And what are we to learn from it?" Let me suggest that the story is here and so dramatically unusual that we would pay attention to its events. Let me assert that there is a great lesson to be learned, especially for us today. Let's look beyond the plain text to the allegorical lesson inside.

Dinah, who was a child of Israel, went outside of Israel to look at those of the world. Even though Dinah was walking with the ungodly, they, especially Shechem, still saw something beautiful, different and desirable within her. But, because Dinah was acting like the world, Shechem responded to her in a worldly way. (Side note: the root Hebrew word translated "rape" is רָפָה, which means to afflict or misuse.) She had entered his culture, and he acted according to his culture.

Shechem then continued to follow his culture and offered to marry Dinah. In response, the sons of Jacob invited Shechem into a covenant relationship, so they could become "like them." But when Shechem and all the men of his city made the choice to enter that covenant, instead of welcoming them, the sons of Jacob killed them.

This overview really provides warnings for us today as, according to the Bible, sons of Abraham, either naturally or by adoption. First, if we act like Dinah, we will send mixed messages to the people of the world that we want to be like them and that their sinful ways are acceptable. Second, the world is the world and will act like the world; don't be surprised by that.

Third, when those of the world come to us seeking to become like us, we should welcome them into covenant with us. Fourth, when we welcome them into covenant, we cannot then kill them by our actions or by not teaching them biblical truths. In biblical thought, death comes when we remove someone from the tree of life or the Bible. Proverbs 3:18 says:

"She is a tree of life to those who embrace her, and blessed will be all who hold firmly to her."

Think of it this way: If we lead people to the knowledge of Yeshua as their Messiah and they enter into covenant with Him through circumcision of the heart (Deut. 30:6 and Rom. 2:28-29), but then we refuse to teach them how to walk fully in that covenant, we are doing to them exactly what the sons of Jacob did.

If we don't teach them how to walk in covenant with G-D and His people, we cannot get upset when they, in their attempt to love the things of G-D, end up misusing, or "raping," them. The only way we can truly teach this is by starting in Genesis and teaching through Revelation.

My last thought on this topic: It is important to also note

that the story doesn't end with the murder of Shechem; it ends with the sons of Jacob plundering the Hivites. If we, as children of G-D, are not willing to welcome people into full covenant relationship with G-D by teaching them the ways of Torah (instructions from G-D), then we should not take their money in tithes and offerings (plunder their finances). {eoa}

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