

READ

Genesis 33:18 - 34:31

REFLECT

Throughout Genesis, the stories of Jacob and his children revolve solely around his sons – it was a patriarchal society, after all – except one. Dinah was the only daughter mentioned in the litany of children, though it is safe to assume that there were more (daughters is plural in verse 9), and it's in chapter 34 that we find out why. After Jacob and Esau were reconciled, Jacob continued on to Shechem, a city in Canaan. He purchased land outside the city gates and started a new life. Dinah went into the city to meet with other women, but while she was there, she was raped. The details of that sexual violation are few, all we know is that Shechem, whose name is the same as the city, saw her, wanted her, and took her. Some commenters on this passage try to make Shechem blameless – he was just a boy in love, they say – but the truth is he violated a woman in such a way that she no longer had value in their society. When his father went to Jacob to ask for Dinah and Shechem to be wed, it was never really an honest ask – who else would marry a woman who wasn't a virgin? In that culture, no one. In asking, Hamor offered to pay whatever price was requested, which sounds generous, but by the families being joined together, wealth would be transferred. We know from previous chapters that Jacob was extremely wealthy by the standards of the day, and purchasing a defiled daughter was a small price to pay to have access to Jacob's wealth.

It didn't sit well with Jacob's sons, so they plotted their revenge. They demanded that every man in the city be circumcised according to the Abrahamic covenant, which they agreed to do, though their willingness to do so had nothing to do with religious conviction but greed and coveting the wealth of others. While they still nursed their wounds, because adult circumcision without access to pain killers is no easy task, Simeon and Levi entered into the city and murdered every man in the town. Jacob was furious because their act of revenge endangered their family. It begs the question of us, too – when, and to what extent, is revenge necessary?

REACT

- There's no feel-good moment in the story of the rape of Dinah, and considering the nature of the story, how could there be? It's all anger and violence and revenge. How do you hear such stories in scripture? How do you reconcile the violence with God's love? What might you need to help?
- It's often said that we will go to any extent to protect the ones we love. Simeon and Levi committed mass murder to extract revenge, and we must ask – was their action just? How different is this story from the many stories told through book and film of extraordinary revenge extracted against those who have done us wrong?
- While Simeon and Levi felt they did what was necessary, Jacob was furious. He saw that their revenge potentially made them all targets for the revenge of other Canaanites and Perizzites, groups they could not possibly defend against. How often have you acted in anger only to open yourself up to further harm?

RESPOND

Learning to Control Our Anger: Simeon and Levi were furious – their sister was violated, and those perpetrators plotted stealing even more from their family. They acted rashly, committing horrific acts in the name of revenge. Jacob saw that their acts were unjust and could possibly continue a cycle of violence that would consume them all. Their revenge, while stemming from a just anger, only hurt the family they sought to protect. Controlling our anger is a necessary spiritual practice, but one that is so very difficult. Mr. Rogers taught children how to control their anger on his television show with the song "[What Do You Do With the Mad That You Feel?](#)" as he encouraged children to stop and think about their actions. In that song he sang, "It's great to be able to stop when you've planned a thing that's wrong, and be able to do something else instead ... I can stop when I want to can stop when I wish I can stop, stop, stop any time. And what a good feeling to feel like this and know that the feeling is really mine. Know that there's something deep inside that helps us become what we can." His lesson is one we could all use relearning because that something deep inside is the Spirit calling us to be what we can.