

WHEN YOU LONG FOR REVENGE

33 ¹⁸When Jacob returned from Paddan-aram, he came in peace to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, and encamped before the city. ¹⁹For a hundred pieces of silver he bought from the sons of Hamor, (Hamor was the father of Shechem), the plot of ground where he had pitched his tent. ²⁰Then he erected an altar there and called it El-elohe-Israel.

34 Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to meet the women of the land. ²When Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and so he brought shame upon her. ³His heart was drawn to Jacob's daughter Dinah; he loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. ⁴Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, Get me this young woman to be my wife. ⁵Now Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter; but his sons were with his cattle in the field, so Jacob remained silent until they came.

⁶And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. ⁷When they heard what had happened, the sons of Jacob came in from the field. They were grieved and very angry, because Shechem had done a disgraceful thing in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter—a thing that ought not to be done.

⁸Hamor spoke with them, saying, My son Shechem's heart longs for your daughter. I beg you, give her to him to be his wife. ⁹Make marriages with us; give us your daughters, and take our daughters for yourselves. ¹⁰You shall live among us, and the land shall be open to you. Live among us and trade with us and acquire property among us. ¹¹Shechem said to her father and to her brothers, Let me find favor in your sight; whatever you shall ask of me I will give. ¹²Make the price for the bride and the gift I am to bring as great as you like, I will pay whatever you ask, only give me the young woman to be my wife.

¹³Now the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father with deceitful cunning, because he had defiled their sister Dinah. ¹⁴So they said to them, We cannot do this thing, we cannot give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised; that would be an offence against us. ¹⁵Only on this condition will we consent to you: if you will become as we are, if every male among you will be circumcised, ¹⁶then will we give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters in marriage, and we will live among you, and we will become one people with you. ¹⁷But if you will not comply with our demand to be circumcised; then we will take our daughter and we will leave.

¹⁸Their proposal pleased Hamor and his son Shechem. ¹⁹The young man did not hesitate to do what they asked, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. Now Shechem was the most honored of all his father's household.

²⁰So it was that Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke with the men of their city, saying, ²¹These men are peaceable toward us; therefore let them live in the land, and trade in it; for, indeed, the land has plenty of room for them. Let us marry their daughters, and let us give them our daughters in marriage. ²²But only on this condition will they consent to live with us and become one people: every male among us must become circumcised, just as they are circumcised. ²³Will not their cattle and their possessions and all their other animals become ours? Just let us give our consent to them and they will live among us. ²⁴All the men who went

out of the gate of his city gave their consent to Hamor and to his son Shechem; so every male was circumcised, everyone who lived in the city.

²⁵On the third day, when they were sore due to the circumcision procedure, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords, attacked the unsuspecting city, and slaughtered all the males. ²⁶They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the blade of the sword, took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and left. ²⁷The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and plundered the city, because those men had defiled their sister. ²⁸They took their flocks and herds and donkeys, they took all that was in the city and all that was in the field. ²⁹They carried away all their wealth, as well as their children and their wives, taking as plunder everything that was in their houses.

³⁰Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, You have brought trouble upon me, you have made me a stench to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. Being few in number, they will join forces against me and attack me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my household. ³¹But they said, Should he have treated our sister like a harlot? (Gen. 33:18-34:31)

Introduction

The warmth of the Christmas holiday was still with me as I drove up to the house.

"Lana, I'm home," I called as I stomped my snow-covered boots on the mat outside the door of our mountainside home. I carried the groceries inside and placed them on the kitchen table.

"Honey, I'm home!" I repeated. No answer.

A little shiver went through me as I took off my heavy jacket. Smiling to myself, I thought that Lana and our little three-year-old son, Morgan, were probably playing tricks on daddy again. I went stealthily down the basement stairs, looked around, but no one was there. Back upstairs, I wandered from room to room, expecting the two of them to come jumping out at me from their hiding place. But they were not there. Looking into my little son's empty room an uneasy feeling came over me. "Maybe Morgan got hurt," I mused, "and Lana had to take him to the doctor."

Once again a chill went through me. Where was Lana? She always left a note when she went away. Trembling, I snatched up the telephone and began calling family and friends, neighbors, hospitals, and finally the police.

My turmoil was interrupted by the thought of my 16-year-old nephew, Johnny. He had spent time in a juvenile detention center and just recently was released. He had the habit of popping in at odd times, and when he did, he gave Lana the creeps.

I decided to check on Johnny and find out if he had any answers. When I arrived, Johnny was lying on his bed. As soon as he saw me, he bolted upright and whined, "I

didn't do anything, Uncle Morgan!" The turmoil inside of me mushroomed. Confused and dazed, I returned home.

The police questioned me for several hours as the search got under way. Deep inside I knew something was terribly wrong and that Johnny was somehow involved.

At dawn the search was resumed. It was mid-morning when the police officer entered the house. "We found them," he said. "They are both deceased. I'm very sorry."

My nephew Johnny was apprehended and charged with two counts of criminal homicide. I longed for revenge. (*POWER*, 11/27/88, pp.2-ff.)

When we learn of moral atrocities, and especially when we are personally victimized by them, we are tempted to seek revenge by taking matters into our own hands. Such was the case with Jacob's sons, when they learned what had been done to their sister, Dinah. But let us resist the temptation to take justice into our own hands, because we must honor the timing and the purposes of God.

I. Don't Take Justice into Your Own Hands, by Personally Carrying Out God's Judgment

Genesis 34:2 records how Shechem took Jacob's daughter, Dinah, "*and lay with her, ... and brought shame upon her*"—in other words, he raped her. When the sons of Jacob hear what had been done to their sister, they were grieved, and they were very angry, "*because Shechem had done a disgraceful thing in Israel*" (Gen. 34:7.)

When Shechem requests Dinah for his wife, and expresses a willingness to do whatever is requested, the sons of Jacob answered him "*with deceitful cunning*" (Gen. 34:11-13.) Jacob's sons tell Shechem they will consent to give their sister to him only on the condition that he and all his fellow townsmen be circumcised (Gen. 34:15.) On the third day, when all the men were sore and incapacitated by their circumcisions, Simeon and Levi lead an assault on the whole community (Gen. 34:25.) When Jacob, their father, protests what they have done, they reply, "*Should [Shechem] have treated our sister like a harlot [and get away with it]?"*

In Genesis 49, referring back to this incident as he lies on his deathbed, Jacob says: "*Simeon and Levi are brothers; their swords are weapons of violence. O my soul, do not enter into their council ... for in their anger they killed a man, and in their self-will they hamstringed an ox*" (Gen.49:5-6.)

Don't take matters into your own hands, by personally carrying out God's judgment—because that is not your right, it belongs to God Himself, and to those whom He has ordained to administer His justice. Speaking of the civil magistrate,

Romans 13:4b declares, *“he does not bear the sword for no reason; for he is a servant of God, an agent of wrath to execute punishment on the man who does evil.”* Note, too, Romans 12:19-21,

Do not avenge yourselves, beloved, but allow God to express his wrath, for it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the LORD. ²⁰But if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for by doing so you shall heap coals of fire upon his head. ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:19-21)

Note that Joseph refused to personally take vengeance upon his brothers despite the wrongs they had committed against him: *“when Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, It may be that Joseph will hate us, and will fully repay us for all the evil we did to him. ...¹⁹But Joseph said to them, Fear not; for am I in the place of God [that I should administer vengeance]?” (Gen.50:15,19)*

II. Don’t Take Justice into Your Own Hands, by Pre-Maturely Carrying Out God’s Judgment

In Genesis 34:7 we read that Jacob’s sons were grieved and very angry because Shechem had done a disgraceful thing *“in Israel.”* The sons of Jacob recognize that the land of Canaan is going to become the land of Israel—it is going to be a land holy unto the LORD as the earthly center of His heavenly kingdom. Consequently, they take it upon themselves to administer the judgment of God and purge the land of its sinful inhabitants.

The judgment they execute against the town of Shechem is the same kind of judgment that would be carried out by Israel in the days of Joshua, Genesis 34:25-29 with Joshua 8:24,27,

On the third day, when they were sore [due to the circumcision procedure], two of Jacob’s sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, took their swords, attacked the unsuspecting city, and slaughtered all the males. ²⁶They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the blade of the sword, took Dinah out of Shechem’s house, and left. ²⁷The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and plundered the city, because those men had defiled their sister. ²⁸They took their flocks and herds and donkeys, they took all that was in the city and all that was in the field. ²⁹They carried away all their wealth, as well as their children and their wives, taking as plunder everything that was in their houses. (Gen. 34:25-29)

After Israel had finished killing all the men of Ai in the field and in the wilderness where they had pursued them—after they had all been killed by the blade of the sword until they were all destroyed, then all the Israelites returned to Ai and put to death by the blade of the sword all who lived in the city.... ²⁷But Israel carried off for themselves the cattle and the plunder of that city, in accordance with the word of Jehovah which he commanded Joshua. (Josh. 8:24,27)

The only difference is that the judgment executed by Simeon and Levi was premature: it was done presumptuously before God's appointed time. Remember Genesis 15:16 where the LORD tells Abraham, "*in the fourth generation your descendants shall come [into Canaan] again; for the iniquity of the Amorite has not yet reached its full measure.*"

Don't take justice into your own hands, by prematurely carrying out God's judgment. The prophecy of Psalm 149:5-9 does declare,

Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. ⁶May the praise of God be in their mouths, and a double-edged sword in their hands, ⁷to execute vengeance upon the nations, and punishments upon the peoples; ⁸to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with shackles of iron; ⁹to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the honor given to all his saints. Praise Jehovah. (Psl. 149:5-9)

But that prophecy will not be fulfilled until the day of Christ's return in glory as the sovereign Judge of the nations, "*Then I saw heaven opened, and there before me was a white horse, and he who sat upon it was called Faithful and True. With righteousness he judges and wages war. ...¹⁴The armies of heaven followed him upon white horses, dressed in fine linen, white and clean*" (Rev. 19:11,14.)

III. Don't Take Justice into Your Own hands, because You are Not Yet Suited to Carry Out God's Judgment

Jacob's sons were rightly grieved and angered by the sin that had been perpetrated "*in Israel*" against their sister. Theirs was actually a righteous and God-like response to evil, as becomes clear when we compare their response to the evil perpetrated against their sister with the LORD's response when He looked upon the sinfulness of mankind:

And Jehovah saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and that every conception of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶And Jehovah felt remorse that he had made man on the earth, and it brought grief to his heart. ⁷And Jehovah said, I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the ground; both man, and beast, as well as creeping things, and the birds of the heavens; for I regret that I have made them. (Gen. 6:5-7)

But Simeon and Levi overlooked the sin that was still present in their own lives. For one thing, there is their use of guile, or, deceitful cunning, in their dealing with Shechem Guile is a character trait which is always associated with the devil, as becomes clear from Genesis 3:1,13, "*Now **the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which Jehovah God had made. ...¹³And Jehovah God said to the woman, What is this you have done? And the woman said, **The serpent beguiled** [or, deceived] me.***"

Then, too, there is their abuse of the sacred sacrament of circumcision. What the LORD intended to be an instrument of blessing, symbolizing entrance into His covenant, they turn into an instrument of death.

Furthermore, their relationship to the LORD is tainted and polluted by their possession of *"foreign gods,"* note Genesis 35:2,4,

Then Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, Get rid of the foreign gods that you have among you and purify yourselves, and change your garments ... ⁴So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods that were in their possession, together with the rings that were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak, which was near Shechem. (Gen. 35:2,4)

In the latter chapters of Genesis we shall also come to see their hatred and envy of their brother Joseph: *"his brothers saw that their father loved Joseph more than all the brothers; so they hated him and could not speak peaceably with him. ...¹¹And his brothers envied him"* (Gen. 37:4,11.) Their enmity against Joseph was so strong that they would even endeavor to kill him: *"Come now, therefore, and let us kill him, and then throw his body into one of the pits. We will say, A wild animal has devoured him. Then we shall see what will become of his dreams"* (Gen. 37:20.)

Don't take justice into your own hands, because none of us are yet suited to carry out God's righteous judgment. When we join with the Lord Jesus Christ in the judgment of the Last Day we shall be prepared to share with Him in that awesome responsibility because at that time we shall be made worthy by His sanctifying and transforming presence: *"We know that when Christ shall be revealed, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he really is"* (1 Jn.3:2b.)

Conclusion

Morgan Hahn struggled with his intense desire for revenge: "I wanted to kill Johnny ... my hatred for Johnny had come to consume me. It was my one pre-occupation."

One night, in desperation, he cried out, "LORD, I can't handle this any longer!"

As he wept before the LORD, the Holy Spirit's power settled upon him with a peace he had not known before.

When we learn of moral atrocities, and especially when we are personally victimized by them, we are tempted to seek revenge by taking justice into our own hands. But rather than do so—in thought or in deed—we must be like the Lord Jesus Christ. Like Him, we must extend forgiveness to offenders and seek their restoration: *"Jesus said, Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing"* (Lk. 23:34.) Like Him, we must commit ourselves and the matter of justice into the hands of God our Father, the One who judges with righteousness:

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he did not threaten; rather, he committed himself to the one who judges with righteousness. (1 Pet. 2:23)

We must look to Him for the grace to be like Him.