

The Story of Joseph

Settled in Shechem

Part 4 – February 5, 2012

We're reading the incredible story of Joseph's family, and we're seeing how the unavoidable messiness of mankind serves to confirm the wisdom of trusting the Spirit and truth of a gracious God. Now, when we left off, 17-year-old Joseph, 11th youngest out of 12, was given the rights of the firstborn (and a coat of authority), after Jacob's #1 son, Reuben, sinned against his father.

Now [Joseph's] brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near *Shechem*, [Some time has passed now since Jacob made the coat of authority and put it on Joseph] and Israel [Jacob/He-struggles-with-God] said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near *Shechem*. [It's one of the oldest settlements in Canaan] Come, I am going to send you to them." [This isn't a trip to the corner drugstore. *Shechem* is 55 miles north, 20 hours as the shepherd walks. Joseph will be traveling alone, through some rough country, wearing the coat of a wealthy man] "Very well," he replied. [Wow. I don't even like to *drive* ... to *Bellingham* ... to see a movie! But Joseph doesn't hesitate to put himself in harm's way for the sake of those who hate him. That's so like Jesus! But, how much is it like *you* (scale of 1-10)?] So [Jacob] said to [Joseph], "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, [Lit. Go and see if all is "*shalom*". The very greeting, you may remember, that they refused Joseph] and bring word back to me." Then [Jacob] sent [Joseph] off from the Valley of Hebron. – *Genesis 37:12-14a NIV*

This distant and dangerous assignment to Shechem suggests that Joseph is quickly rising to his new authority, displaying strong leadership capabilities, and confirming Jacob's decision. But, why are Joseph's brothers so far from home, in Shechem? The short answer is: Jacob owns property there. But I can make the answer *much* longer than that! Let's Flashback about three years.



[Jacob] arrived safely at the city of *Shechem* in Canaan and camped within sight of the city. For a hundred pieces of silver, he bought from the sons of Hamor, [The ruler] the father of Shechem, [The prince] the plot of ground where he pitched his tent. There he set up an altar ... – *Genesis 33:18b-20a NIV*

Shechem is a *very* significant, *sacred* site. Do you know why? We have to flash way back to when God *first* led Jacob's Grandpa Abraham (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) into the land of Canaan ...

The Lord had said to Abram, [His name hasn't changed yet] "... go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation ... and you will be a blessing ... Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at *Shechem*. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." [Did you see what just happened?! God just created the *Promised Land*! And He did it at *Shechem*!] So [Abraham] built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. [Later (Gen 17:11), circumcision becomes the sign of the covenant] – *Genesis 12:1-2, 6-7 NIV*

So, Jacob is coming to claim the promise and raise a nation! Remember when God told Abraham to try and count the stars and then said "So shall your offspring be"? (Gen 15:5)



Shechem sits in a lush valley pass between two small mountains: Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. After their first victories in the Promised Land, Joshua brings over 700,000 men (plus wives and children) here. Six tribes stand on Mount Ebal, six on Mount Gerizim. And they pronounce the blessings and warnings of God. Over 1,000,000 people on each mountain! Imagine Abraham down in Shechem looking up, trying to count his offspring. It's not a coincidence that Joseph dreamt about the stars bowing to him.

Later yet, it's at Shechem (just after King Solomon's death) that the kingdom of Israel tragically splits in two. (2 Chr 10:1) And Shechem becomes the capital of the rebellious northern kingdom. They were conquered and assimilated and they "paganized" Yahweh. (2 Kin 17:24-34) And when they weren't allowed to help rebuild the temple, they denounced it, and built a rival on Mount Gerizim!



Do you know who they are? *Wait for it ...* Samaritans (as in "The Good Samaritan"). And *that's* why they were *so* despised by the Jews. So, why are the brothers in Shechem? *Well ... well ...* a well. They had carved one, 100 feet deep, through solid rock! Still there (it's one of the most agreed upon ancient sites). But, the *better* question is: *why* is Jacob so concerned about 'em? *Well*, it's because something *horrific* had happened in Shechem. In fact, the *entire* 34th chapter of Genesis is devoted to it.

I'm feelin' a *major* flashback! Thing is, there's *so many* natural springs in Shechem, that a well just isn't, well, necessary ... *unless* you've been instructed to keep yourselves separate. While the boys were busy carving that deep ol' well, their sister Dinah was mixin' it up with the heathen, Shechem, upper crust.

Now Dinah, the daughter Leah [the *unloved wife*] had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite [HIGH-vight], the ruler of that area, saw her, he took [Seized] her and violated her. [Hanging with the popular crowd rarely ends well] His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her. [Nothing like the *tender words of a rapist!*] And Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as my wife." When Jacob heard that his daughter Dinah had been defiled, [Someone told him about the rape *and* that Dinah was still at Shechem's, either restrained or too ashamed to return] his sons were in the fields with his livestock; so he kept quiet about it until they came home. [So they could talk over what to do] Then Shechem's father Hamor [who doesn't seem to know that *they* know] went out to talk with Jacob. Now Jacob's sons had come in from the fields as soon as they heard what had happened. [Whoever told Jacob probably ran to them] They were filled with grief and fury, because Shechem had done a disgraceful thing **in Israel** [This is the first time this word is used to describe a *nation*; this is a turning point for God's chosen people] by lying with Jacob's daughter — a thing that should not be done. But Hamor [Apparently unaware of their intel] said to them, [with a straight face] "My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. [You can tell, you know, *by the rape!*] Please give her to him as his wife. [No confession or expression of sorrow, shame, or guilt] Intermarry with us; give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. You can settle among us; the land is open to you. Live in it, trade in it, and acquire property in it." Then Shechem said to Dinah's father and brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, [That could prove difficult] and I will give you whatever you ask. Make the price for the bride and the gift I am to bring as great as you like, [He assumes it'll be reasonable, if he assumes they don't know] and I'll pay whatever you ask me." [Yeah, you're gonna pay] — Genesis 34:1-12a NIV

Because their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob's sons [Acting as ignorant as Hamor and Shechem assume they are] replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Hamor. They said to them, "We can't do such a thing; we can't give our sister to a man who is not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us. We will give our consent to you on one condition only: that you become like us by circumcising all your males. [They don't know how many men they might have to fight to get to Dinah, so they decide to incapacitate every last one of 'em!] – Genesis 34:13-15 NIV

So, Shechem and Hamor go to the city gate (the foundation of which remains to this day), and they speak to all the men of Shechem. And upon hearing what I can only assume was *THE BEST SALES PITCH OF ALL TIME*, every man in Shechem agrees to be circumcised.



Three days later, [Tough three days for Dinah, thinking she's been abandoned. Tough for those men too; day three is when the agony reaches its *zenith*] while all of them were still in pain, [Just *picture* it ... I mean, don't "picture it", but just think about the fever, the infection ... the *inflammation*; they can't walk let alone fight!] two of Jacob's sons, Simeon [#2 son of the *unloved wife, Leah*] and Levi [#3 son of the *unloved wife, Leah*], Dinah's brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. [Scholars estimate about 70] They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem's house and left. – Genesis 34:25-26 NIV

Dinah likely remained out of shame. We do that. We remain in the destructive effects of sin when we're ashamed to admit the part we've played in bringing it about. How long do you allow shame to keep you locked up in the tormentor's house?

The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled. They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children [The women were most likely compliant, because they and their children couldn't have survived being left on their own] ... – Genesis 34:27-29a NIV

So, when Joseph's story begins, his family includes *all* of the wives and children, whose husbands and fathers were murdered by Simeon (#2) and Levi (#3)! Quite a family dynamic!

If we flash-forward to Jacob's deathbed we find some supplemental information. #2 and #3 are the only brothers coupled together for Jacob's prophetic blessings and curses.

Simeon and Levi are brothers — their swords are weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased. Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! – Genesis 49:5-7a NIV

To "hamstring oxen" is to cripple by cutting a tendon behind the knee. What they didn't plunder they "[took pleasure]" in destroying. No injury can justify hatred, because hatred is like a cancer that attacks the body; it can't win. At best it'll be a draw, because when cancer kills its host, the cancer dies too. Your hatred is a cancer. Now, Go back to *just after* it happened.

Then Jacob said to Simeon [#2] and Levi [#3], “You have brought trouble on **me** by making **me** a stench [We say “I look bad”, they say “I *smell* bad”] to the Canaanites and Perizzites [PEE-rez-ights], the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against **me** and attack **me**, **I** and **my** household will be destroyed.” [The inspired writer is making a statement about Jacob’s character with all the “MEs” and “Is” and “Mys”] But they replied, “Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?” – Genesis 34:30-31 NIV

“No! Dinah *deserved* to be rescued. And evil men *deserve* to be dealt with, but in a way that honors God’s Word and God’s ways. You can’t use her defilement as an excuse to defile God. We’re called to be a blessing but you’ve become a stench! Jacob doesn’t say any of these things ... but he should’ve! You can’t use the sign and seal of God’s covenant as a weapon! What are you thinking?! It’s like whenever we use God’s Word in an unkind or unloving way, to prove or win or condemn. When we use His Word as a weapon, we’re not saving souls, we’re killing them. And it comes from hate for an enemy rather than love for God’s truth, and submission to His Spirit. Remember when Jesus spoke to the woman at the well?

[Jesus] came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, [Shechem no longer existed] near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there ... – John 4:5-6a NIV

The woman said, “Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep.” (John 4:11) Sure was, 100 feet through solid rock! And she said, “Our ancestors worshiped on *this* mountain [She’s referring to Mount Gerizim], but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” (John 4:19-21) And Jesus replied ...

Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ... a time is coming and has now come when the *true worshipers* will worship the Father in *spirit* and *truth*, for *they* are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in *spirit* and in *truth*. – John 4:20-24 NIV

This is how we allow God to govern our mind and emotions. We learn to love his truth and submit to His Spirit. That’s true worship that honors God’s covenant of grace. We can’t allow defilements *against* us to justify defiling God’s covenant *with* us. And *beware* of your pride. It’ll justify *anything* on your behalf once you *give it* permission. Jacob should’ve said something like that. But, he just buries the idols of the widowed Shechemites and flees with his family. Amorites take over Shechem. On his deathbed, Jacob said he had to reclaim his plot of ground, and his well, by force.

Then Israel said to Joseph, “Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers. [And He did. Guess where Joseph’s bones were brought and buried: Shechem (Josh 24:32)] I give you one portion [That’s a pun, because “Shechem” is Hebrew for “portion”] more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow. – Genesis 48:22 NAS

So, you can see why Jacob would be a little concerned for the “shalom” of his sons and flocks ... or his *flocks and sons*. Soon after this, His name was changed to “He struggles with God”, his beloved wife died giving birth, his #1 son defied him, and he gave the birthright to #11. And now, #11 is on his way to Shechem ... in a fancy coat! And two *especially* cold and cruel brothers are waiting and watching and fully aware that if something *horrific* was to happen to #11 that birthright would likely fall to #2 or #3.