

### “...make ye marriages...”

Are we careful as Christians? Do we separate from the world as we ought? Or, do we mix with it freely, pretending all is well? In the days of Jacob such questions had far reaching consequences, and the answers often led to ruin or to war. Today, sadly, Christians tend to be far more sophisticated, so true answers to vexed questions are buried under a pile of human excuses. This is not a call to be war-like all the time, but a call to be honest and honourable.

With sometimes intense responses, some Christians will appear to be quite shocked by fellow Believers who fight back against injustice or sinful attack upon them. They say it is not how Christians ought to respond. In this they are theologically and Biblically crude, for they do not understand what they are saying.

The same objectors will decry Christians who do fight back in any way, and will even shun them. Evidently, they have never had to face anything objectionable before, for their words come cheap. It is always easy to speak out against war, or defence, when one is safe and well and untouched personally!

As one who constantly experiences attacks and hatred against me, I know that Christian responses are varied and can be quite complex in nature. I also know that to retain Christian virtue can sometime be very hard indeed. That is why I could not speak against any Christian who defends himself or who even attacks an attacker, verbally or physically. At times there may be a need to rebuke, but this is far better than sitting in an armchair issuing platitudes or sombre self-righteous statements... or silence. Would such a critic stand by Christ on the spiritual battle-field? I doubt it. There is a time to cry, a time to laugh, a time to be crafty, a time to be wise, and a time to fight.

We must always be careful not to be continually battle-minded, but we must also be always battle-prepared. That is, we must fight when the occasion demands it. In between battles – which *will* come – Christians must be prepared. That is real life.

### Verses 1-4

1.

“And Dinah the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of

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the land.

2.

And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her.

3.

And his soul clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel.

4.

And Shechem spake unto his father Hamor, saying, Get me this damsel to wife.”

Dinah ('judgment') was the daughter of Jacob's 'senior' wife, Leah. The chapter appears to begin quite some time after Jacob moved to the area. When his family first appeared outside the Hivite city to pitch their tents, the eldest of his sons was about 14: In this chapter we see the sons were old enough to wage battle.

We are told that Dinah went out to see the daughters of the land: in other words, she went visiting the local girls. During her time in the city, the ruler's son, Shechem, saw her and took her to his house, where he 'defiled' her. This appears to have been rape, as the word 'defiled' *might* suggest. However, Shechem seemed then to have fallen in love with her and wanted her to be his wife. Of course, this did not absolve him from what was a crime. His later kind words could not remove what he had done.

Before writing this study I heard on a radio programme that we ought to feel glad for Prince Charles and his wife, Camilla, because they are now so happy. The past, we are told, should be kept in the past and we must move forward. This does not sit easily with me, however. The two colluded to have an illicit relationship for many years, undermining and destroying a marriage and, possibly, leading the wronged wife to become depressed and herself an adulteress. Nothing can remove this unseemly past and, whilst the past is the past, it forms the future

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which, in this instance, is based on lies, deceit and immorality.

Christians who have been caught in such a mess must always get rid of the past properly, by repenting and returning to God's way, seeking forgiveness of those they have wronged, and then living a life consistent with their confession of faith. We cannot just 'move on': we have no choice but to remain in our position of unresolved sin until everything has been 'sorted out'. In many ways, this should be similar to the way excommunication cases are sorted out, with genuine and recognisable repentance showing a real attempt at putting things right.

Though his method of procuring Dinah was illicit (we do not know if it was actually criminal, for we do not know what the laws of the land were; even so, his actions were illicit and sinful), Shechem asked his father, Hamor, to ask for Dinah's hand in marriage. He simply dismissed what he had done without a hint of remorse or repentance.

### Verses 5-10

1.

"And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter: now his sons were with his cattle in the field: and Jacob held his peace until they were come.

2.

And Hamor the father of Shechem went out unto Jacob to commune with him.

3.

And the sons of Jacob came out of the field when they heard it: and the men were grieved, and they were very wroth, because he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter; which thing ought not to be done.

4.

And Hamor communed with them, saying, The soul of my son Shechem longeth for your daughter: I pray you give her him to wife.

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And make ye marriages with us, and give your daughters unto us, and take our daughters unto you.

6.

And ye shall dwell with us: and the land shall be before you; dwell and trade ye therein, and get you possessions therein.”

As often happens, a sin will often catch people out, sometimes in an unexpected way. At any rate, Jacob came to hear of the rape of his daughter. Naturally, he was furious. But, the emphasis was then put on his sons, who were out tending his animals. When they returned home that night, he must have told them what had happened to their sister.

A while after the event, Hamor visited Jacob. We are not told if he knew what his son had done, only that Shechem had asked him to broach the subject of marriage with Jacob. The sons heard that Hamor was visiting and were extremely angry. The text contains an interesting statement: “he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob’s daughter”. The nation of Israel had yet to be formed, so this was an additional piece of information inserted by the writer of Genesis, to show that Shechem had brought infamy upon the whole race of Hebrews, both in their infant form now, and in their full form later.

Hamor, unaware of the undercurrent of anger, asked for Dinah to be given to Shechem as his wife. Hamor went further, probably thinking of the usual two things – peace with the strangers amongst them and increased prosperity. He asked that Jacob’s small tribe and his own people, should think about freely marrying each other. In this way, he said, both peoples would integrate and become profitable in their dealings.

Jacob, however, was very aware of the need to remain apart. His family had a history of keeping blood relationships within the wider family. This close monitoring of family ties was to increase in strength as the Hebrew nation grew, because it represented purity of people and religion. Jacob knew there was no way his family could integrate with pagan peoples.

Christians today should bear this in mind when they so easily commune with peoples of false

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beliefs and religions, or those who openly practise evils or ungodly ways. Eventually, quickly or slowly, their minds and hearts will turn to the ways of sinners. This is why a Christian CANNOT, in all good conscience, marry an unbeliever.

### Verses 11-18

1.

“And Shechem said unto her father and unto her brethren, Let me find grace in your eyes, and what ye shall say unto me I will give.

2.

Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me: but give me the damsel to wife.

3.

And the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father deceitfully, and said, because he had defiled Dinah their sister:

4.

And they said unto them, We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one that is uncircumcised; for that were a reproach unto us:

5.

But in this will we consent unto you: If ye will be as we be, that every male of you be circumcised;

6.

Then will we give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people.

7.

But if ye will not hearken unto us, to be circumcised; then will we take our daughter, and we will be gone.

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8.

And their words pleased Hamor, and Shechem Hamor's son.”

Shechem spoke directly to Jacob and his sons, without any sense of shame. Perhaps he was unaware that they knew what he had done. On the other hand, being pagan, his actions might have been normal for his own people. He asked them to say ‘yes’ to his request. He said he would gladly pay the dowry (bride-price) and any gifts or presents extra to that, so long as he could marry Dinah.

The family did not respond as they truly felt, but replied ‘deceitfully’. This can mean treacherously or falsely, but it can also mean craftily. Possibly thinking of what would happen - war – if they spoke their minds, they kept quiet and pretended to comply. They had a plan, and it was consistent with the way Jacob himself was also a very clever man at playing out craftiness. But, in this matter, Jacob was not party to the subterfuge.

Instead of giving a straight ‘yes’, the sons made an excuse, that Shechem could not yet marry Dinah because the Hivites were uncircumcised. It would be to our shame, said the sons. Therefore, every man of the Hivites had to be circumcised before Dinah could marry Shechem! Once they had performed this action, the two peoples could intermingle and marry. If the Hivites did not comply, then Jacob’s tribe would move on, taking Dinah with it. Of course, Shechem and Hamor took this to be acceptance. They did not realise that the sons had a plan of revenge to accomplish, and were covering their true purposes. Like father, like son!

### Verses 19-24

1.

“And the young man deferred not to do the thing, because he had delight in Jacob's daughter: and he was more honourable than all the house of his father.

2.

And Hamor and Shechem his son came unto the gate of their city, and communed with the men of their city, saying,

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3.

These men are peaceable with us; therefore let them dwell in the land, and trade therein; for the land, behold, it is large enough for them; let us take their daughters to us for wives, and let us give them our daughters.

4.

Only herein will the men consent unto us for to dwell with us, to be one people, if every male among us be circumcised, as they are circumcised.

5.

Shall not their cattle and their substance and every beast of theirs be ours? only let us consent unto them, and they will dwell with us.

6.

And unto Hamor and unto Shechem his son hearkened all that went out of the gate of his city; and every male was circumcised, all that went out of the gate of his city.”

The words “And the young man deferred not to do the thing” might appear to mean that Shechem did not comply. But, this is just a sentence structure problem. Perhaps a better way to phrase it would be: “And the young man did not defer to do the thing”. That is, Shechem decided to do it straight away without delay. We are told that Shechem was ‘more honourable’ than others in his father’s household. It is hard to discover why, when it was he who had defiled Dinah, but that is what we are told. It seems from a later text that Dinah might have remained in Shechem’s house all this time.

Shechem and his father, Hamor, entered the city and gave an account of the discussions to the people. Here was a wonderful opportunity not only to ensure peace by marriage, but also a sudden enrichment of the small kingdom. The two leaders persuade the inhabitants that the deal was a good one, but that every male had to be circumcised first. They put forward the proposition as if everyone would benefit from a week or so of soreness, by acquiring greater riches and peace! Evidently the people agreed, for all males were then circumcised.

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### Verses 25-31

1.

“And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males.

2.

And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out.

3.

The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and spoiled the city, because they had defiled their sister.

4.

They took their sheep, and their oxen, and their asses, and that which was in the city, and that which was in the field,

5.

And all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives took they captive, and spoiled even all that was in the house.

6.

And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.

7.

And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?”

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On the third day came the reckoning. Two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, took up their swords and entered the city, fearlessly in great anger, and killed every male there. Probably they also had others with them, servants, who aided them. The males were still extremely sore because of the 'operation', so they were unable to fight back properly. Hence the 'deal' between Jacob's sons and the people of the city! The sons thereby debilitated the entire male population of the Hivites, so they could be destroyed in one day by just two people (and servants).

The sons searched for Dinah and took her out of the city. Then they 'spoiled' the city in revenge. That is, they plundered it of its riches, as is the unwritten rule in ancient warfare. The sons also took the animals – sheep, oxen, asses – and everything they found in the fields. They even took the children and wives captive. This was a total obliteration of a small city.

Jacob, far from being pleased, was horrified. 'You have now caused me to become loathed in this land, and by the Canaanites and the Perizzites', he complained! 'Our tribe is small in number – now we will be destroyed ourselves!' His sons were adamant – should Shechem have got away with treating their sister like a prostitute? Thus, they justified themselves.

How should Christians respond to being mistreated? The usual answer is that we should 'turn the other cheek'. But, is this always the answer? I do not think so. There are times when we must turn the other cheek – but read the context first. At other times we should respond with vigour in defence. At yet other times we should be crafty.

Look at the many ways in which Christians fought against invading armies in, say, the last great war. They used many instances of subterfuge and even deception. I have asked all through these Genesis readings if such are consistent with being a Christian. I can only say that each Christian must do what God leads him to do. We are not the world's doormats, to be trodden down whenever sinners feel like doing so!

There is obviously much to discuss on this matter...I only suggest that we all consider what we ought to do in specific cases, but we should never think of ourselves as mere vassals to be ordered about by anyone who is wicked. I see no glory in being beaten or abused! I see no particular Christian virtue in being used as a punch-bag or victim for the delight of sinners. We must respond honourably and yet firmly.

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