Dinah and the Shechemites

2020 is now history and I am not sorry to see it go. The COVID 19 virus was a major disrupter affecting virtually every aspect of our lives. It seems to have had a particularly harsh impact on our K-12 education system. I am sure that Angie, Kaitlyn and Steve would agree that teaching students last year brought unprecedented challenges. While many children fell behind, parents who felt the need to more closely monitor the progress of their children saw better results. The best environment in which is raise children is the household of a married couple with a strong father figure. Sadly, this has become less prevalent with a divorce rate roughly double that of the 1950’s. This coupled with an out of wedlock birth rate of nearly 40% has decimated the ranks of traditional families. Children without a father in the house to provide a good role model are more likely to underperform by just about any measurement. Higher crime rates have also been linked to the increase in out of wedlock children. Having a father in the house is not a guarantee of success in raising children. Fathers must take an active role in raising their children, providing both encouragement and discipline. Our study of Genesis chapter 34 reveals a father who failed as a parent.

The chapter begins with Dinah who was Leah’s daughter visiting with some of the local women. In the previous chapter Jacob had settled in Shechem after meeting Esau rather than accompanying him back to Seir. Shechem was located in a valley between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal about 40 miles north of Jerusalem. This would have been a central location in Canaan and it was positioned along important trade routes making it a commercial center. Dinah probably saw women engaged in activities much different than what she was accustomed to and she was naturally curious. She caught the eye of Shechem the son of Hamor who raped her after which he asked his father to get her as his wife. Hamor went to Jacob to ask for Dinah to marry Shechem and dealt not only with Jacob but his sons who were enraged that their sister had been violated. They responded that they could only agree if all the males in Hamor’s family would agree to be circumcised. Hamor agreed and after the men had been circumcised and were recovering from the procedure, Simeon and Levi attacked the town, killing all the males in retaliation and carrying off all their possessions and women and children.

Looking at the parties involved, none of them acted with honor. Shechem was controlled by lust of the flesh, unable to restrain himself. Hamor was controlled by lust for riches, seeing opportunity in the situation. He thought that by intermarrying with Jacob’s family they could obtain Jacob’s wealth for themselves. Jacob’s sons were righteously indignant about the rape of their sister, however they were deceitful in agreeing to intermarrying with Hamor’s family as a pretext to trick them into circumcision. Notice that there was no mention of the purpose of circumcision which was to obey God’s command. Instead, they just said it was their custom. Simeon and Levi killed men who were completely innocent of Shechem’s crime.

Finally, we see the many ways that Jacob abdicated his responsibilities as a father. The situation could have been avoided altogether if Jacob had protected his daughter. While her exact age is not known, estimated range from 9 to early teens. Jacob should not have allowed her to go among unfamiliar people without being properly escorted. Better yet, he should not have allowed her to associate with pagans at all. When Jacob found out about the rape of his daughter, his initial reaction was to do nothing. There was no law enforcement available to take the matter to, in fact there were no laws. I can’t help wondering what Abraham would have done. He assembled a small army to rescue his nephew so there is little doubt that the rape of his daughter would have caused him to take swift action against Shechem. Jacob then allowed his sons to handle the matter without his supervision. His indifference to providing much needed leadership in this situation led to the slaughter of many innocent men. His reaction to his son’s violent assault on Shechem was not that they had done a terrible thing but that it might result in retaliation against Jacob and his family. Jacob’s greatest sin may have been settling in Shechem. In Genesis 31:13 God declares Himself to be the God of Bethel when He ordered Jacob to leave Laban and return to the land of his kindred perhaps indicating that Jacob should have gone to Bethel.

Jacob’s failures as a father indicate that he did not instill in his children strong habits of worshipping God. I think the most important lesson we can learn from this chapter is that parents need to raise their children in a Christian environment. Establishing a personal relationship with Jesus will build a strong foundation for everything else that will follow in life including education, careers and most importantly, marriage and parenting as those children grow up to have children of their own.