

# The Circumcision at Shechem

## 34: 18-24

**DIG:** What does the deception of Jacob's sons say about the spiritual condition of the family? What does it say about Jacob's spiritual leadership?

**REFLECT:** When we act like the world acts, what does this do to our testimony?

Their plan was to incapacitate the city. Taking the lead in the negotiations, **Simeon** and **Levi** had gambled that **Hamor** and his son **Shechem** were desperate to join with the Hebrews for commercial advantage, and they were right. They swallowed the bait, hook, line and sinker! The unsuspecting royal family eagerly agreed to the condition of circumcision, beginning with **Shechem** himself. The young prince, who was the most honored of all his father's household, lost no time in doing what they said, because he was greedy for financial gain like his father, plus he really was delighted with Jacob's daughter (34:18-19). **Shechem** was so respected that the others were sure to follow his lead.

So **Hamor** and his son **Shechem** went to the gate of their city to speak to their fellow townsmen and lay the whole proposition before them. The city gate was where official business was always discussed. They said: These men are friendly toward us, let them live in our land and trade in it; the land has plenty of room for them. In other words, let them become citizens of our city-state. We can marry their daughters and they can marry ours. But the Hebrews will consent to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised, as they themselves are (34:20-22).

The fact that the men of the city agreed to the proposal set before them demonstrated how eager they were to reap the economic benefit of intermarriage with the Hebrews even though it would require a certain amount of pain.<sup>526</sup> They reasoned that their pain would be for their gain: Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? This was not brought up in the negotiations with the brothers, and they left out the little detail about **Shechem** raping **Dinah**. But why bother them with the details! The motivation was purely financial. **Hamor** and **Shechem** concentrated entirely on the financial gain intermarriage would provide for their fellow townsmen. So they asked: Let us give our consent to them, and they will settle among us (34:23).

It seems strange that neither Reuben nor Judah took part in this plot. Reuben, especially as **Dinah's** eldest brother, should have taken charge if **Jacob** didn't. Later developments show that both Reuben and Judah were much less willing to kill than the rest of their **brothers (37:21 and 26)**. They were not cruel and probably didn't want to participate in the killing after realizing what **Simeon** and **Levi** were really planning, though not to the extent of doing anything to prevent **them** from carrying out **their** plan. **Jacob's** other sons were probably still too young to take an active part in the killing, but all the brothers probably did participate in the looting. In any case, **Simeon** and **Levi** took the lead.

**Their** treachery was cloaked in honor. I am sure that **they** were partly motivated to honor the good name of **their sister**, and **their** rejection of intermarriage with the Canaanites was admirable, but **they** were completely wrong in taking the law into **their** own hands in such a cruel and violent way.<sup>527</sup>

**All the men who went out of the city gate** were easily persuaded and readily **agreed with Hamor and his son Shechem**. As a result, **every male in the city was circumcised** and unable to protect **themselves (34:24)**. Ready for vengeance, these two hotheads were ready to finish what **they** had started.