

A Contextual analysis of Genesis 34 and 1 Samuel 18:1-9

Genesis 34 and 1 Samuel 18:1-9 are two very different texts, conveying different messages and lessons. The Bible rarely goes into a lot of depth about what people are feeling or thinking, only states what happens, because of this it is not always clear what certain chapters are meaning to convey. 1 Samuel 18:1-9 has been interpreted different ways, two ways that are very distinctly opposed to one another. Using a queer perspective, some scholars suggest a homosexual relationship between David and Johnathan, I will give an analysis of these arguments to dispute claims of a sexual love between them and display the love of true friendship, the importance of which is conveyed in multiple other stories in the old and new testament, such as the book of Ruth and John 11:5 which speaks of Jesus love for Lazareth.

Genesis 34 seems to be much more straightforward in that it is a story of rape, deceit, murder and vengeance. There is however a strong lesson in it that can be overlooked due to the self-righteous anger we would all feel should (God forbid) a loved one ever be harmed in such a way. Using a masculine perspective, I will analyse the actions of the males within that text to discern where those lessons lie and what purpose the texts hold in regard to the ideals of what it means to be a man today and what the Bible teaches us it means to be a man using Genesis 3 to contrast this.

For a female to make take a masculine perspective we must first ask: - what are the roles of men and women according to Genesis 3?

In Genesis 3, the roles of men and women are explained in seemingly narrow terms. First, The Lord decrease that Eves sorrow will be “greatly” increased in bearing children - The use of the word greatly implies that women were always going to have to bring children into the world through suffering, however, it shall be increased - and that she must cleave unto her husband, and he will rule over her. Through analysis we can deduce that this is not as misogynistic as it might first appear, only a direct consequence of the action of both Adam and Eve. Genesis 3:6 states “and she gave the fruit to Adam who was with her” this suggests that while Eve’s being deceived by the serpent, Adam was who was silent, was not deceived and was instead faced with the choice of whether to put God first, or to put his pride first and follow his wife. It is for this reason that Eve must now look to her husband and not the other way round, for Adams mistake he must bear the responsibility of leadership, a role that if not performed correctly can be detrimental for many and when carried appropriately can be a great weight. Adam’s further punishment is his hardship in finding daily sustenance, he must now toil the earth through sweat and tribulation to feed his family every day of his life in a time before farming was even thought of would have been a very sorrowful task indeed (Gen 3 17-19).

Through analysis of what transpires here, we can see the role of man as it should be and as it should not be. God ask Adam what has happened giving him opportunity to take responsibility for himself and for his family. Adam does not. He instead blames his wife. Now he must pick up his mantle to accept responsibility and accountability as leader and as protector. So, the roles are established. The man must provide, labour, protect and lead. While the woman’s role is to bare children and “cleave unto her husband” the word cleave shines a more important light on the role of woman than “to just bare children and obey,” to cleave means to be glued to, to stay with and follow. This strongly suggests how women are needed by men, to compliment the masculine energy with the feminine, man cannot be without woman and woman cannot be without man.

In Genesis 34 Sechem does not take on the responsibility of the role of man by the Genesis' standards as to begin with, he is not yet Dinah's husband, he does not protect her and has no right to lead her anywhere. Yet overcome with his feelings of lust he attacks her and then seeks to marry her. Dinah is only mentioned in as much as what happens to her in this chapter. It is not presented as though it does not matter, as it is stated by the writer that it ought not have happened (Gen 34:7). We are not told about how Dinah is left feeling after this experience, but we are told how her brothers are feeling: - they are "grieved" and "wroth" (Gen 34:7). It is equally intriguing that we are not told how Jacob feels about what happened to his daughter, only that he agrees to the marriage between the two tribes. Jacobs actions are revealed but not his feelings. What we see through Jacobs actions is a passiveness, perhaps even forgiveness? Though it was not his primary place to forgive. Whatever else, a definite willingness to join the two tribes and make peace over the transgression. The brothers in contrast are led by their emotions.

This opposes what we learn in Genesis 3 about the role of a man. For example, Adam was faced with what he knew was right – to obey God - and was faced with what his pride told him to do in following his wife. We are shown that Adam, being led by his feeling took him further away from God and the consequently after came the fall. Here we can see a similar thing happen through the actions of the sons of Jacob. They were grieved and they were wroth (Gen 34:7) and led by these feelings they were quick to act and first deceived Hamor - father of Sechem - in tricking him and all his subjects into circumcision and vulnerability. This could be seen as a betrayal also by the brothers as the compliance of the Hivites shows a great trust and eagerness to be allied with the Israelites which would have strengthened both tribes and perhaps eventually brought the Hivites to the God of Abraham. Remember, it is only Sechem that has transgressed against the Dinah and by proxy her family. Now through revenge made in haste the whole of the Hivite males were slaughtered, their land sacked, women and children left without fathers, leaders or protectors and their livelihood stolen.

Van Meter believes that the actions of the brothers were so excessive due to the passiveness of their father "Dinah, we are told, "went out to see the daughters of the land." The phrase speaks of impropriety. She went unchaperoned into the nearby pagan city to visit her peers. We should not imagine that this is the first time Dinah and Sechem had met; the implication seems to be that these curious, unchaperoned visits to the city were somewhat frequent. The question must be asked at this point—and not for the last time in this study—where was her father in all of this? Surely, he ought not to have allowed his daughter to travel unaccompanied to a pagan city? (Van Meter 2007). He goes on to mention how Jacob had much less a care for the children of Leah than he did for the children of Rachel. Be this as it may, Jacob is the head of the household, so had the brothers adhered to Jacobs leadership, the only sorry case would have been that of Dinah, forced to marry her attacker. Which is needless to say an abhorrent thing. Had Jacob accepted the burden given to men in Gen 3 more wholly and had more of a care for his children born by Leah, the horridness might have been avoided altogether.

On first reading this chapter, I understood the brothers and could not understand Jacob. However, we must remember that they are still people, they are nuanced. Jacob is a passive father, failed to protect his daughter and then failed to defend her after, this does not mean he does not care, only he acts in the way he knows how. The sons of Jacob are overcome with vengeance and take this to excess to rescue their sister. Jacob and his sons are on opposite sides of the scale when there was a

middle that could have been found.

The overall lesson of this peace is that revenge only creates more problems as stated by Jacob in Gen 34:30 “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.” Why was Jacob not pleased at his sons defending and rescuing their sister? When endeavouring to understand the role put upon men by the Lord himself it starts to become clearer. The brothers being led by their emotions and taking the law unto themselves, murdered innocent people and opened their family to danger and retaliation which in the next chapter leads them to flee elsewhere to avoid being overcome. So, where forgiveness and passiveness could have brought about much overall good (for all but sorry Dinah), revenge only brought about horror and retreat.

The relationship between David and Johnathan has been discussed at length by many scholars to suggest that there was a homosexual relationship between them Scholz says “Work of the Spirit through prophetic encounters created a queer relationship between David and Jonathan. It is relationship or intense homoeroticism and covenant.” (2016) He argues that there was a homosexual love between David and Johnathan and that this was God’s will for Johnathan to protect David. Sholtz also draws attention to the whole start of the chapter being homosexual due to Goliath being referred to as uncircumcised, “Saul states, “[y]our servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God...The LORD, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine[i].” Indeed there is, otherwise the condition of his phallus would not have been communicated, nonetheless David cuts off the man’s head and delivers it to Saul.” (Scholz 2016) however I do not believe that the reference to uncircumcision is sexual in the least. It is merely to differentiate that this man is not like us. To suggest that a reference to circumcision is sexual, is too hyper sexualize a text where it need ought not be sexualised at all. The law of circumcision was not given to the Israelites for sexual purposes: - “The miraculous nature of Isaac’s birth is the key to understanding circumcision as the sign of the covenant. After God made His promise to Abraham, every male member of Abraham’s household was required to be circumcised (Gen 17:15–27). Every male—and every woman, since the males were all incapacitated for a time—knew that circumcision was connected to God’s promise. It probably didn’t make any sense, though, until Sarah became pregnant.” (Heiser 2017).

It is my belief that what the Bible is conveying here (and has done in previous chapters and chapters following) is the importance of a true friendship. As social beings we, many of us desire a romantic companionship in our life, though this is something we generally wait (sometimes a long time) for. While we are waiting, we develop instead very special bonds through friendship. This does not happen with everyone we meet. Many of us can testify to having had at least one friendship in life that became as family, that we recognise almost immediately as kindred spirits. These friendships usually become deep and loved within the first repour of meeting that person. Even Jesus Christ had such friendships with John and Lazareth (John 11: 1-44).

When Johnathan strips himself of his robe and armour this is symbolic of stripping himself of his privilege and position (D, Sanford 2021). The chapter reads “Joanathan loved David as himself” this does not read sexual at all when you consider the second commandment “to love others as you do yourself” it is by its plain definition a holy love. How do we love ourselves? A question for the philosophers, I’m sure. However, it is fair to say that we (generally) do not love ourselves in a sexual/erotic way. We are imprinted upon to preserve ourselves, to look after and sustain ourselves, often to serve ourselves. To love another in that way is a holy love indeed.

In conclusion the role of a man is hard one to master and if we are to believe the Bible only one has ever performed the role perfectly, that being Jesus Christ. In Genesis 34 all the men mentioned fall short, Sechem in his attack of Dinah, Hamor in his failing to reprimand his son, Jacob in his passiveness and the brother in their lust for vengeance. All fall short and all suffer the consequences, with one evident lesson left for the reader, that being: revenge can only cause more harm than the initial slight.

As for the friendship of David and Johnathan, it is shown in what good can come of serving each other and acting in true friendship, for Johnathan saved and preserved David's life out of his love for him and to agree with Scholz it does indeed seem to be the will of God that they should have such a special bond in order to preserve the lineage that would eventually birth Christ. As Markus Zhender says "it has to be pondered how Jonathan's delight in David is connected with YHWH's delight in David, is Jonathan's delight to be understood as a consequence of YHWH's delight on the human level? Perhaps the connection hinted at here can be described even more specifically: YHWH's delight in David becomes effective in David's political success; Jonathan's delight in David is the means by which YHWH's delight operates. This would mean that Jonathan's delight in David corresponds to the will of YHWH; YHWH would even be its ultimate source. Alternatively, Jonathan's delight could be understood as a correspondence to the divine delight: David's way is smoothed by the double support given him both by God and by men; thereby, the hint at David's status as "beloved" that is included in his name is confirmed in a concrete manner^[xiv]." (Scholz 2017).

To love is to protect, in protection there is provision of a multitude of need and in this we are sustained. The role of a man can be taken on by any woman as shown through the book of Ruth in Naomi and Ruth' friendship and in both their strong characters. Which shows that women can be relied upon to be strong and yet companionship is needed to strengthen us all.

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