

The Children of Jacob

Using Evolutionary Biology to Explore Genesis

David J. Meltzer

The latter third of the book of Genesis relates the complex and volatile relationship of the patriarch Jacob, his four wives, and their thirteen children (twelve sons, one daughter).¹ The story involves a family that was, at times, astonishingly dysfunctional and deceitful, and that engaged in acts of sibling rivalry that skated dangerously close to homicide. And yet, at the same time, family members were also capable of great moments of altruism and self-sacrifice.

Sages and commentators through the ages have, understandably, drawn from the story of Jacob's family profound moral lessons and explained their sometimes inexplicable behavior in many ways, not least (of course) as the by-product of God's plan and purpose. I do not want to pursue the story to that end. Instead, I wish to examine it from a very different perspective—that of evolutionary biology. For whether the story is true or not,² or directed by divine hand or not, the behavior of the players (puzzling as it may be) neatly conforms to expectations of models derived from principles of natural selection. The fit is not perfect. Even so, it is close enough to help us explore and perhaps better understand certain patterns of human behavior depicted with such universal and enduring appeal in the Torah.

I examine here the story of Jacob and his children in terms of kin selection and inclusive fitness, parental investment, and the corollaries thereof.

A Brief Summary

That story has many pieces, of course, but I want to focus on one rather large part of the narrative: the relationship between Joseph and his brothers. The story is well known, and needs only a brief summary. But first, a reminder of who the players are: in antici-

DAVID J. MELTZER is Professor of Anthropology at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.

pation of applying the theory of kin selection, it is important to know precisely who is related and how. Jacob, of course, is the father of Joseph and all his siblings, but the thirteen siblings have four different mothers: Leah and Rachel, who are themselves sisters (the daughters of Laban), and Zilpah and Bilhah, who are the maidservants of Leah and Rachel, respectively. It is not known whether Zilpah and Bilhah are related to each other in any way, but they are not described as such (Gen 29:24 through 30:10 are the relevant passages).

In Table 1, the children are listed by their mother in their order of birth; the accompanying numbers denote their overall birth order within Jacob’s family:

TABLE 1. THE CHILDREN OF JACOB AND HIS WIVES³

| <i>Leah</i> | <i>Rachel</i> | <i>Bilhah</i> | <i>Zilpah</i> |
|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1 Reuben | 12 Joseph | 5 Dan | 7 Gad |
| 2 Simeon | 13 Benjamin | 6 Naphtali | 8 Asher |
| 3 Levi | | | |
| 4 Judah | | | |
| 9 Issachar | | | |
| 10 Zebulun | | | |
| 11 Dinah | | | |

Joseph, one of the last of Jacob’s sons, is something of a dreamer (literally and figuratively) and is not well liked by his brothers. Their dislike stems partly from jealousy over the obvious affection their father Jacob had for Joseph (manifest by the ornamented tunic Jacob made for him) and partly because Joseph’s dreams—which he related—foretold that he would rule over them. They conspired against him, first considering killing him outright. But cooler heads (Reuben’s and Judah’s) prevailed, and they opted to sell him into slavery to a passing caravan of Ishmaelite traders, who carried him off to Egypt. After the traders departed, Joseph’s brothers tore his tunic, splattered it with goat’s blood, and presented it to their

father as evidence that Joseph had been killed by a savage beast (Genesis 37).⁴

In Egypt, Joseph does well working for Potiphar, a courtier of the Pharaoh. However, he ultimately falls from grace after a run-in with Potiphar's wife (she wished to sleep with him; he declined) and is thrown into prison. In prison, Joseph's ability to interpret dreams helps give hope of release to another of Pharaoh's courtiers—and proves true. The courtier is released and restored to his position as Chief Cupbearer. Two years later, Pharaoh himself is in need of someone to interpret his dreams. The Chief Cupbearer tells him of Joseph, who is promptly summoned to appear and interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Joseph sees in them a foretelling of seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of famine.

Grateful to Joseph for the advance warning, Pharaoh appoints Joseph vizier of the land, charged with storing the surplus accumulating during the years of plenty, and dispensing the food when the years of famine begin. Hearing of Egypt's stores, refugees from other famine-stricken areas come into the country seeking relief. Joseph's brothers from Canaan are among them, but not all Joseph's brothers: Benjamin has stayed behind with Jacob. When the brothers meet the vizier to ask for food, they do not recognize him as their brother Joseph—though he recognizes them (some two decades have passed, and by then Joseph has gone native). After a severe interrogation, Joseph sends the brothers back to Canaan to fetch Benjamin, keeping Simeon as hostage to ensure their return. Jacob is very reluctant to release Benjamin, but Reuben and Judah assure his safety, and after the brothers return to Egypt with Benjamin, Joseph reveals his true identity. The brothers then return to Canaan a final time, to bring Jacob and the entire family over to settle in Egypt (Genesis 39–47).

Those are the bare bones of the story. It is, of course, a story of sibling rivalry—as are many of the stories in Genesis. But what makes this one of particular interest is the sheer size of the family, the biological relationships among the brothers, and how those affect their behavior toward one another—for the relationships among all those brothers and their actions in the narrative provide a key to probing a bit more deeply into this case of sibling rivalry. That does not obviate the importance of the central question, of course, which is why Joseph's siblings (as a group) see an advantage to getting rid of him, even to the point of considering killing him. But what it does do is help frame the obvious additional, and

perhaps more interesting, question, which is, can we explain the parts played in this story by the sons of Leah, as opposed to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah? Consider, for example, that:

1. Joseph brought “bad reports” of his brothers to Jacob, but only about the brothers who are sons of Bilhah and Zilpah (Gen 37:1).
2. Only the sons of Leah, and not the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, initiated an effort to protect Joseph from being killed (Reuben and Judah are the brothers who so act⁵) (Gen 37:21–22, 26), or were identified (Reuben again, in several places) as being distraught at Joseph’s apparent death (Gen 37:29–30, 42:22).
3. Joseph—seeing all his brothers in Egypt except the youngest (Benjamin)—insisted they go back to Canaan and return with Benjamin, who had stayed behind with Jacob (Gen 42:24).
4. When Jacob balked at the prospect of releasing Benjamin (Gen 42:38), it was again Reuben and, later, Judah, who guaranteed for their father Benjamin’s safe journey to Egypt, with Reuben even offering Jacob his (only) two sons as “collateral” (Gen 42:37, Gen 43:8–9).
5. Joseph, after seeing his brothers on their first visit, contained himself; on their second visit, he broke down at the sight of Benjamin—and provided him a greater portion at lunch (Gen 43:29–31, 34).
6. After Joseph planted a goblet in Benjamin’s bag, “discovered” it, and insisted Benjamin stay behind as his slave (Gen 44:17), Judah offered himself as a hostage in Benjamin’s stead (the ultimate altruistic act) (Gen 44:33–34).
7. When Joseph finally revealed himself to his brothers and sent them back to Jacob with provisions and clothing, Benjamin was sent with extra clothing and three hundred pieces of silver (Gen 45:22).

What accounts for the intensity of the sibling rivalry? Why are some siblings, and not others, willing to risk themselves for Joseph and (later) Benjamin? And why is Benjamin’s presence so critical—and so unhinging—to Joseph? The answer, I believe, can be found in models of evolutionary biology.

A Theoretical Framework

The pivotal theoretical concept here is *kin selection*, which begins with the observation that your genes are shared by kin, the degree of sharing being roughly proportional to the degree of relatedness: close kin have more in common with you genetically than do more distant kin. From this, it follows that your evolutionary fitness, normally calculated in terms of your own reproductive success and contribution to the gene pool of subsequent generations, can also be measured (or enhanced) by your contribution to the reproductive success of your relatives—discounted according to how closely related they are to you (Dawkins 1976; Sulloway 1996). This is the measure of *inclusive fitness*.

Genetic relatedness is measured by a coefficient of relationship, r , which expresses the chance of a gene's being shared between two relatives. The relatedness between parent and offspring is always $r = \frac{1}{2}$ (you get half your genes from each parent). The relationship between two *full siblings* (who share both parents) is on average 0.5 ($r = \frac{1}{2}$)—half the genes possessed by one will be found in the other (this can vary by the luck of inheritance draw). Two *half siblings*—say, same father but different mother—are more distantly related: $r = (\frac{1}{2})^2 = \frac{1}{4}$ (0.25). And so on, with r diminishing at increasing kin distance.

Inclusive fitness provides a means of understanding acts of altruism and acts of selfishness. An *altruistic* act is one in which a person increases the fitness of another at the expense of himself or herself (Wilson 1975:117). That person might share food, shelter, or vital information, or provide help in times of danger. Doing so can potentially diminish that individual's own fitness—it may even prove fatal (consider the case of a person who lunges in front of a car to push a child from the path of danger). Under certain circumstances, however, there is an evolutionary payoff to altruism that is tied to the measure of inclusive fitness. For example, since (on average) half of your genes are shared with, say, your child or your brother, an altruistic act on their behalf, even if it reduces your own fitness (consider the case of a parent saving a child from an oncoming car), nonetheless helps ensure that your own genetic material (in some form) is still passed along to the next generation.

The flip side of an altruistic act is a *selfish* one, in which a person increases his or her fitness by lowering that of others (Wilson 1975:117). In this instance, the person might withhold food, shelter,

or the like and thereby diminish his or her chances for reproductive success. Here, too, there can be an evolutionary payoff, for reducing the fitness of others can help ensure greater proportional representation of your genes in subsequent generations. Selfish acts, too, play out on a scale of relatedness, with the expectation that they will occur more commonly against individuals who are more distantly related (or who are completely unrelated).

To an individual in a group (or, in this instance, an individual in a rather large family), the evolutionary advantage of assisting a relative (engaging in altruistic acts) will depend on three factors: the cost to the individual's own fitness, the benefit to the relative, and the average proportion of genes shared by the two individuals (Clutton-Brock and Harvey 1978:7). For altruism to be favored, the following must obtain:

$$C_a < r \times B_k$$

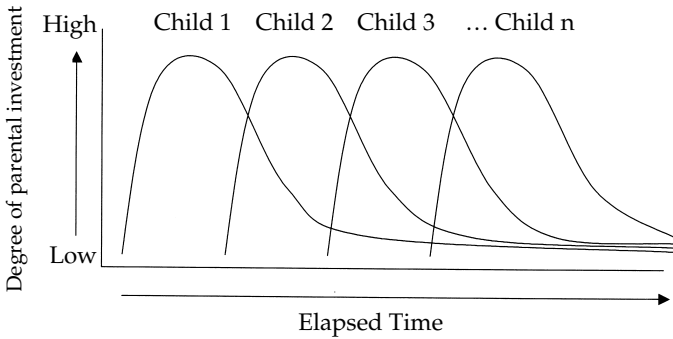
(where C_a is the cost to the individual actor, B_k is the benefit to the recipient, and r is the degree of relatedness). In contrast, selfish behavior will be favored when the benefits to the actor are greater than the cost to the relative:

$$B_a > r \times C_k.$$

In general, altruistic behavior is more likely where r (relatedness) is greater; in turn, selfish behavior increases as r diminishes.

In order to tie this to family matters, it is necessary to link the discussion to *parental investment*. This is defined as the energy investment by the parent(s) in their offspring that increases the children's chances of survival—at the cost of the parent's ability to invest in other offspring (Trivers 1972). The degree of parental investment varies over time or, more appropriately, over the course of the offspring's life (Figure 1). Each child requires a substantial input of parental resources in the years immediately after birth. Thus, the curve depicting the costs of (or degree of) "parental investment" rises rapidly, stays high for a few years, then begins to diminish as the child learns to fend for him or herself, and the parents can afford to devote fewer resources to that child (Figure 1). Resources freed up are, in turn, able to be invested in subsequent children. Parents have to invest greater amounts of energy in their offspring when the children are young, and progressively less as the children grow older.

FIGURE 1.
GENERALIZED DEGREE OF PARENTAL INVESTMENT
BY CHILD OVER TIME



Generalized diagram showing the degree of parental investment required by a child over the course of his/her lifetime. Readers (especially parents!) will readily appreciate that this is a theoretical curve, and the slope on the right side can vary significantly in its rate of decline. Were these curves to show the investment the parents were able to provide their children, they might be shaped and sized differently, depending on whether the parents had sufficient resources to invest comparably in their successive offspring, or whether their resources were finite and subsequent children received slightly less, as a consequence of older sibling(s) still dependent on the parents and competing for favor and resources.

Once all children have reached maturity, the genetic material of a *parent* would be favored over the long term (in principle) if the parent allocated *all* remaining resources *among all the offspring equally* again, because the parent has the same genetic stake (relatedness) in all of them ($r = 0.5$, noted above). An equal distribution of investment among all the offspring reduces the risk that the family lineage will become extinct (Sulloway 1996:65). In reality, of course, there can be differences in the reproductive value and health of the offspring, such that might provide a basis for the parent to discriminate against one child in favor of another (A. Rogers, personal communication). Moreover, if a parent (Jacob, say) had multiple spouses (Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah) and children with each, then those various spouses would have an equal stake in each of *her own children* but—unlike the parent common to all (Jacob)—would not have the same stake in the children of the other spouses (for reasons explained below).

Now, from an *offspring's* perspective, getting only an equal share of parental resources seems a terrible investment strategy. Each child is related most closely to himself or herself ($r = 1.0$), to any full siblings by only $r = 0.5$, and to half siblings by just $r = 0.25$. Thus, from a child's point of view, he (or she) is twice (or four times) as valuable a vehicle for projecting his (her) own genes into future generations as any of his siblings, and hence feels he (or she) should get 100 percent of the parental resources. Which is where, evolutionary biologists argue, sibling rivalry and parent/offspring conflict come in—often exacerbated, of course, by primogeniture rules and other religious and cultural laws and traditions (or, say, preferences for the children of favored wives).

In the case of an only child, the genetic interests of the parent and the child coincide. But in the case of large families, like Jacob's, there are competition and conflict: it is in the interest of each offspring to reduce the number of competing siblings in order to increase the parental investment in themselves. The most extreme instance of such behavior is fratricide: killing one's brothers. In the case of multiple parents and full and half siblings, it would also be in the interests of the children of the same set of parents to act altruistically toward one another, and more selfishly toward the children from other parents (that is, toward their half siblings).

Applying the Theory

To apply these notions to this case, it is necessary to first establish the coefficients of relationship among the sons of Jacob. As just noted, the relatedness between two *full siblings* (who share both parents—like Joseph and Benjamin, sons of both Jacob and Rachel) is an average value of 0.5 ($r = \frac{1}{2}$)—half the genes possessed by one sibling will be found in the other. In contrast, two *half siblings*—the same father but different mother (say, Joseph the son of Rachel, and Dan the son of Bilhah)—are more distantly related: $r = (\frac{1}{2})^2 = \frac{1}{4}$ (0.25). Complicating the picture here is the fact that Leah and Rachel are sisters (it is not known if they are full or half sisters). Their sons in turn share a common ancestor in Laban (Leah and Rachel's father) and, thus, are more closely related to each other than the standard half siblings—but still not so closely related as full siblings. If their mothers are half sisters, their coefficient of relationship is $r = (\frac{1}{2})^2 + (\frac{1}{2})^4 = 0.3125$; if they are full sisters, $r = 0.375$

(after Dawkins 1976). A matrix of the overall relatedness (r) values of the various sets of children is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2.
MATRIX OF COEFFICIENTS OF RELATIONSHIP (r -VALUES)
AMONG JACOB'S SONS

| | <i>Sons of Leah</i> | <i>Sons of Rachel</i> | <i>Sons of Bilhah</i> | <i>Sons of Zilpah</i> |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Sons of Leah</i> | 0.5 | - | - | - |
| <i>Sons of Rachel</i> | 0.375 | 0.5 | - | - |
| <i>Sons of Bilhah</i> | 0.25 | 0.25 | 0.5 | - |
| <i>Sons of Zilpah</i> | 0.25 | 0.25 | 0.25 | 0.5 |

Clearly, each group of full siblings is more closely related to one another than they are to their half siblings. But the children of Leah and Rachel are more closely related to each other, than either sibset is related to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. All of them bear the exact same relationship ($r = \frac{1}{2}$ or 0.5) to Jacob and their own mother. And this presents some problems.

In the narrative, Joseph is set upon by his brothers—they want to kill him. It is the ultimate selfish behavior, and perhaps understandable, strictly in terms of resource allocation: all of them stand to gain by his disappearance (Jacob's inheritance would be divided 11 ways instead of 12—fewer, if more siblings could later be gotten rid of).⁶ Jacob himself presumably understood the tension and the rivalry among his children. When Joseph angered his brothers by telling them of his dreams that foretold his success over them, not only did they hate him for it, his doing so angered Jacob (Gen 37:5–11). That said, Jacob also exacerbated the situation, since he apparently loved Joseph best of all (for the stated reason that “he was the child of his old age”—but perhaps also because he was the first son of his preferred wife), and made that obvious to the other siblings (the ornamented tunic). When his brothers saw Jacob's preference for Joseph, “they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him” (Gen 37:3–4).

Joseph's status as favored son, his arguably obnoxious behavior (tattling on his older brothers—or at least his most distant brothers—which is typical of younger children seeking greater parental attention [see Sulloway 1996]), and his young age, provided his brothers the excuse and ability to get rid of him easily. After all, why (from their perspective) should they share any parental resources with someone who was so far down the primogeniture list, and yet who was receiving (as they saw it) an inordinate and unfair share of parental attention and material goods?

Yet, whereas the majority of Joseph's brothers sought to kill him, it was Reuben (Gen 37:21–22), and then Judah, who argued to spare his life, and instead send him away. Why would Reuben and Judah do that? It was an altruistic act of some courage, as they perhaps risked the ire of their brothers, two of whom (Simeon and Levi) had already shown a considerable blood lust in the defense of Dinah. Killing Joseph, from the point of view of kin selection, is not such a good thing, since—detestable as he may be and the threat to their inheritance he represents—he is, nonetheless, their close kin. By killing him they reduce their inclusive fitness: “After all [Judah said], he is our brother, our own flesh” (Gen 37:27). There is no gain to removing him altogether from the gene pool. Judah says so explicitly (Gen 37:26—though of course, he does not mention the part about the gene pool). So siblicide has no appreciable evolutionary payoff. Sending him packing to a faraway land and convincing their father he is dead would be a much better solution to the problem.

Why was it Reuben and Judah (sons of Leah) who protected Joseph, and not a son of Bilhah or Zilpah? Kin selection theory predicts the more closely related brothers would have more to gain (in terms of inclusive fitness) by acts of altruism. As noted, the sons of Leah are more closely related to Joseph ($r = 0.375$) than the sons of Bilhah or Zilpah ($r = 0.25$). And while the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah would calculate the payoff differently, because they were younger sons (5 to 8 in the birth order), they would have less authority in the matter.

But why do the altruistic gestures and actions come solely from Reuben and Judah, and not from any of the other of *Leah's* sons? I am on more speculative ground here (and aware that a large part of the answer might rest in the political conditions among the descendant groups at the time the Torah was canonized). One (admittedly speculative) possibility is that Reuben, as the oldest

and thus first in line for the inheritance, could perhaps afford to be more magnanimous (altruistic) than his sibs. Judah—who was well down the primogeniture ladder—could perhaps enhance his standing in the eyes of his father by an altruistic act (Sulloway [1996] discusses the strategies later-born children use to capture parental attention and investment).

As to why Joseph was particularly keen to see that Benjamin was alive and well, the answer seems quite clear: Benjamin was his full brother, the one in the family closest to him, and the only other child of Jacob and Rachel. Jacob certainly understood the matter clearly, which is why he balked at the prospect of letting Benjamin travel to Egypt, explaining, “his brother is dead and he alone is left” (Gen 42:38). And Joseph, providing extra food, clothing, and gifts of silver on his only full sibling, well recognized the potential danger of doing so. He firmly admonished his brothers before they set out to return to Jacob in Canaan, “Do not be quarrelsome on the way” (Gen 45:24). Joseph, perhaps more so than any of his brothers, fully understood the cost of rekindled sibling rivalry.

There are in the story of Joseph many acts of altruism or selfishness—some overt and extreme, others more subtle (they tend to be more extreme in the earlier part of the narrative—the events leading up to Joseph’s being sent packing to Egypt). Throughout, the narrative and the action revolve around the sons of Leah, and around Joseph’s genetically closest sib, Benjamin. It is the sons of Leah who are willing to act on behalf of Rachel’s sons (Joseph and Benjamin), and not the sons of Bilhah or Zilpah.

I do not suggest the sons of Jacob consciously calculated any of this, any more than an outfielder calculates a series of differential equations in predicting the trajectory of a fly ball (Dawkins 1976). But I do think it possible they were well aware of the closeness of the relations. Indeed, how could they not be: two of the mothers were sisters and wives; two were handmaidens. I find it interesting and telling that they behaved in ways that conform to the way in which those seeking to maximize their inclusive fitness suggest they ought to behave.

Final Thoughts

While I have focused on the story of Joseph and his brothers, an evolutionary approach might also shed light on the rivalry between Leah and Rachel (as played out in their differential fertility),

the story of the rape of Dinah,⁷ or perhaps Jacob's blessing of his sons (Gen 49:1–27)—the ultimate in parental portfolio divestment. Of course, this approach need not be limited to the story of Jacob's family: it might be interesting to apply to other parts of the Torah as well.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. The specific chapters and verses are: *Vayetze*, Chapters 29–32:3; *Vayishlah*, Chapters 32:4–36; *Vayeshev*, Chapters 37–40; *Miqetz*, Chapters 41–44:17; *Vayigash* 44:18–47:27; and *Vayehi* 47:28–50:26. I used the translation in W. G. Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981).
2. There is, of course, a school of thought that holds the story is a later allegorical construction, created with the intent of rooting a history of the twelve tribes in terms of familial relationships (*Encyclopaedia Judaica* [Jerusalem: Judaica Multimedia, 1997]). In this interpretation, the relative “rank” of the twelve sons, whether they are the children of Jacob's wives or of the maidservants, are taken to indicate the relative status of the tribes at the time the story was written. Whether there actually was this patriarchal family does not particularly matter, since I am interested in the relationships as depicted—whether actual or contrived. If the story is contrived, its author had a profound knowledge of human behavior and was a deft teller of morality plays. If the kinship is a political metaphor, it is no surprise: kinship was an important organizing device in these early societies.
3. Leah's disproportionate number of children (7 of the 13) is in keeping with the generally observed pattern in polygynous families, in which the first wife (Leah, in this case) routinely has more children than her co-wives (e.g., Bean and Mineau 1986; Garenne and Van de Walle 1989). The reasons behind their differential fertility are discussed in detail by Josephson (2000). I am grateful to Alan Rogers for pointing out this connection, and to Steve Josephson for the references and explanation that back it up. What makes this case even more interesting, however, is that Leah, though the first wife, was not the favored wife. Rachel was. The text plays out their own subplot of sibling rivalry, which centers directly over the issue of fertility: Leah was very successful at having children, Rachel was not. Leah knew it, and reveled in the fact. Rachel resented her for it, which is why their

respective handmaidens became involved as surrogates, and which perhaps intensified the rivalry among the sons (see Gen 29–30:24).

4. Benjamin, the other son of Rachel, and Joseph's only full (closest) sibling, has no role in this part of the drama, presumably because he is too young to be in the fields with his brothers, and was certainly too young to protect his older brother. Dinah is not mentioned here either.
5. That both Reuben and Judah are given this role may reflect two separate biblical traditions around at the time the Bible was canonized, but that is not especially problematic, since both are sons of Leah.
6. I assume Dinah would not be in the line of inheritance, as daughters would not gain inheritance rights until much later in the Torah (see the story of the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 27).
7. Dinah was raped by Shechem, son of Hamor. Hamor came to Jacob to make restitution, request Jacob's permission for Shechem to marry Dinah, and establish an economic and political alliance between the two communities. Jacob was silent. His sons Simeon and Levi, Dinah's full brothers ($r = 0.5$), responded for him. They struck a deal with Hamor, agreeing to his terms, but only if every male in Hamor's town was circumcised. Hamor agreed. Simeon and Levi, however, evidently had no intention of honoring the arrangement, for when the townsmen—holding up their end of the bargain—were at a moment of profound vulnerability, Simeon and Levi slaughtered them, and stole their flocks, wealth, children, and wives (Gen 34:24–31).

Among the many questions raised by this troubling episode: why did Simeon and Levi do what they did: their actions seemingly far out of proportion to their stated goal of defending their sister's honor. And, why hadn't Reuben, Dinah's oldest brother, joined with Simeon and Levi in this apparent defense of their sister's honor?

I am on even more speculative ground here, but consider this: although Simeon and Levi spoke for him, Jacob heard the terms of the rich settlement and alliance offered by Hamor (Gen 34:9–12) in recompense for what was (admittedly) a terrible family tragedy, but perhaps one not uncommon in those more violent times. Consider the possibility that Jacob's silence reflected the fact that he was considering accepting Hamor's terms, thereby making the best of a bad situation—one does not want to put too fine a point on it, but this would not be unreasonable, given the degree to which daughters of marriageable age were an economic commodity. If Jacob entered such an alliance, Reuben (as the firstborn) would most stand to reap the benefits of that alliance as he would be first in line to inherit Jacob's estate. Simeon and Levi, as latter-borns, stood to gain little by any alliance with Hamor, and short-circuited it and gained their own wealth by slaughtering all Hamor's men and seizing their wealth, women, and children (in keeping with the notion of family members as valuable commodities). When Jacob's voice finally returned, he disapproved strongly of Simeon and Levi's actions, but largely in economic and political terms (the loss of the wealth and power offered by Hamor),

and said nothing in response to their stated rationale for the attack (Gen 34:30–31).

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