

Genesis 34 – Dinah and Shechem

Review

Last time, we looked at the famous story of Jacob wrestling with God who renamed him Israel. Then after meeting and reconciling with his twin brother Esau, Jacob continued across the Jordan to Shechem in Canaan where he built an altar that he named אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל **El-Elohe-Israel** – God the God (or ruler) of Israel.

Shechem Rapes Dina

We now come to one of the most deplorable episodes in all of God’s Word.

¹Now Dinah [דִּינָה dīnâ - judgment] the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land. ²And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humiliated her. ³And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. ⁴So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, “Get me this girl for my wife.” Genesis 34:1-4 (ESV)

Recall from our study of Genesis 30 that Dinah was born to Jacob’s first wife Leah at Paddan-aram. When we studied that passage, we noted that daughters are not ordinarily listed in Biblical genealogies except when the woman plays a special role in the narrative. Such is the case with Dinah.

Believe it or not I have actually heard a Bible “teacher” say that Dinah shouldn’t have been hanging around with the women of Shechem, so she brought the rape upon herself. Well in my humble opinion that man should be horsewhipped (in love, of course) for uttering or even *thinking* something so outrageous. I can’t remember who it was, since that teaching was so thoroughly execrable. Rape victims are *never* culpable in any way for the assault upon them.

I have also heard it said that Shechem didn’t really rape Dinah – that the sexual encounter was by mutual consent and desire. But the scripture of Genesis 34:2 seems to clearly indicate otherwise. The Hebrew text of the verse isn’t too precise about the incident, but all the English language translations available to me agree that Shechem’s sexual assault was forcible not consensual. Indeed, the NLT and NIV say explicitly that Shechem raped her.

Although the Law of Moses had not yet been given at the time of this rape, its provisions about rape are quite clear. They are informative but frankly somewhat surprising and disturbing to me, especially since they differ in the punishment to be given to someone who rapes a married or betrothed woman and someone who rapes an unbetrothed virgin. Furthermore, the Law makes a distinction between forceful sexual assault and consensual sexual relations outside the bounds of marriage.

²³“If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, ²⁴then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor’s wife. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

²⁵“But if in the open country a man meets a young woman who is betrothed, and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. ²⁶But you shall do nothing to the young woman; she has committed no offense punishable by death. For this case is like that of a man attacking and murdering his neighbor, ²⁷because he met her in the open country, and though the betrothed young woman cried for help there was no one to rescue her.

Genesis 34 – Dinah and Shechem

28“If a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are found, 29then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has violated her. He may not divorce her all his days.

Deuteronomy 22:23-29 (ESV)

To be perfectly honest, I am outraged by these various distinctions. I adamantly believe that rape should always carry the most severe possible punishment for the attacker alone regardless of the circumstances or status of the victim or the attacker. Perhaps it's my own distorted modern outlook, but I don't believe sexual relations between two consenting adults – and I want to emphasize *adults* – should not be punishable. Please don't misunderstand me. That doesn't mean that I think adultery or extra-marital sexual relations are right. I just don't think they should be punished. Indeed, most of us can attest that these sins carry their own punishment out of which – Praise God! – Jesus has rescued us all by His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection!

But with all that said, the Law of Moses is *God's*, not mine. No human being has the right or indeed the power to question either its letter or its Spirit. Ours is but to obey it insofar as we are able by God's strength, even (and especially) when we don't understand God's purposes in establishing His Law.

Notice that Shechem's rape of Dinah clearly falls into the category outlined in Deuteronomy 22:28-29. Even though the written Law had not yet been handed down, Shechem unwittingly obeyed this provision calling for the one who rapes an unbetrothed virgin to pay money to her father and marry her. That is exactly what Shechem and his father tried (unsuccessfully) to do as we shall soon see.

5Now Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah. But his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came. 6And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. 7The sons of Jacob had come in from the field as soon as they heard of it, and the men were indignant and very angry, because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing must not be done. Genesis 34:5-7 (ESV)

Recall that the 'man' with whom Jacob wrestled at Peniel had given Jacob the name **יִשְׂרָאֵל** **yisrā'el** although both the Old and New Testaments continue to refer to him by his birth name – Jacob. Here in Genesis 34:7 we find the second reference to the *nation* of Israel established by Jacob's sons. The first use of the name **יִשְׂרָאֵל** **yisrā'el** to refer to the people descended from the man Israel was in Genesis 32:32 where the Genesis writer mentioned that the people of Israel don't eat the sinew of an animal's thigh to commemorate the dislocation of Jacob's hip when he wrestled with God.

The name **יִשְׂרָאֵל** **yisrā'el** can refer to the people of the nation founded by Jacob's twelve sons. It is also used to refer to the land in which the people of the nation of Israel lived – sometimes called **אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל** **'ereṣ yisrā'el** to make a clear distinction. Finally, the name **יִשְׂרָאֵל** **yisrā'el** can refer to the modern nation state of Israel.

In English, the ancient people of the nation are traditionally called Israelites, while the citizens of the modern state of Israel are called Israelis. Note that Israelis are not necessarily Hebrews (Jews) or even of Hebrew descent. There are many Arab Muslim Israelis and many Israeli Gentiles from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. Tragically, roughly 20% of Israelis who are Jewish in ethnicity are professing atheists. It is particularly heartbreaking that some of these survived the Nazi Holocaust but came through it all with the conviction that a truly loving God would never allow such a thing and therefore must not exist.

Genesis 34 – Dinah and Shechem

8But Hamor spoke with them, saying, “The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him to be his wife. 9Make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. 10You shall dwell with us, and the land shall be open to you. Dwell and trade in it, and get property in it.” 11Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, “Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give. 12Ask me for as great a bride-price and gift as you will, and I will give whatever you say to me. Only give me the young woman to be my wife. Genesis 34:8-12 (ESV)

Jacob’s Sons Take Revenge Upon Shechem

13The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah. 14They said to them, “We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us. 15Only on this condition will we agree with you—that you will become as we are by every male among you being circumcised. 16Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to ourselves, and we will dwell with you and become one people. 17But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter, and we will be gone.” Genesis 34:13-17 (ESV)

Strictly speaking, when Jacob’s sons said that allowing their sister to marry a Gentile would be a disgrace to them, they weren’t being completely deceitful. Recall that Abraham had made his servant whom he sent to Haran to find a wife for his son Isaac swear that he would not allow Isaac to marry a Canaanite woman (Genesis 24:3). Furthermore, God later commanded the Israelites not to intermarry with the people of Canaan.

3You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, 4for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. Deuteronomy 7:3-4 (ESV)

Jacob’s own brother Esau had married two Hittite (Canaanite) wives (Genesis 26:34), and this had so displeased their parents Isaac and Rebekah that they sent Jacob away to Paddan-aram to take a wife from among Rebekah’s family. Of course, Rebekah hid from Isaac the *real* reason she wanted him to send Jacob away. Esau had threatened to kill Jacob after he and his mother deceived Isaac into giving Jacob his blessing of the firstborn that rightly belonged to Esau (Genesis 27:46). Simeon – one of the two main conspirators in this revenge plot against the men of Shechem – hypocritically had a son by a Canaanite woman (Exodus 6:15), although the Word never says that Simeon actually married the woman, so I guess that was AOK.

Jacob’s sons may even have convinced themselves that allowing Dinah to marry an uncircumcised man would be a disgrace so they could rationalize the unrighteous vengeance they were about to wreak on the men of Shechem. But their self-deception reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of God’s circumcision covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17) – a misunderstanding that continues to the present day. Yes. All Israelites are circumcised in obedience to that covenant, but not all circumcised men are Israelites. Even if the men of Shechem got circumcised (as they did), they

Genesis 34 – Dinah and Shechem

would still be Canaanites not Israelites, and the marriage of Dinah to Shechem would still be a disgrace – to say nothing of the rape that started this whole filthy ball rolling.

Furthermore, Jews are circumcised because they are Jews, not vice versa. Circumcision doesn't make someone a Jew any more than baptism makes someone a Christian. Yet Israelites down through history have continually gotten this backwards to the point that they call themselves “the circumcision” and the Gentiles “the uncircumcision.” To a degree, Jews have exalted the act of circumcision above God's sovereign choice of the Israelites as His own people – the very choice which circumcision was meant to symbolize. The apostle Paul made this crystal clear in his letter to the Roman church.

28For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. 29But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. Romans 2:28-29 (ESV)

As we read through the remainder of this despicable story, it is difficult to imagine that Jacob's sons didn't premeditate the revenge they took upon the men of Shechem. Furthermore, it seems they weren't content to avenge their sister's rape upon the rapist alone, but upon all the men of his city. Genesis 34:7 states clearly that they were already angry and indignant when they first arrived in from the fields. They may have even hatched their plan to take revenge while they were still on the way to this meeting.

What is missing from this passage is Jacob's part in laying this trap for the men of Shechem. We know that he was present when this discussion took place. If he didn't agree with what his sons were plotting, why didn't he reign them in before they carried out their murderous revenge? For that matter, why did God allow the rape and the subsequent murders in the first place? What can we possibly learn from this sickening episode? These are some difficult questions for which I must admit I don't have comfortable answers.

18Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem. 19And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most honored of all his father's house. 20So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying, 21“These men are at peace with us; let them dwell in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters as wives, and let us give them our daughters. 22Only on this condition will the men agree to dwell with us to become one people—when every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised. 23Will not their livestock, their property and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us.” 24And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city. Genesis 34:18-24 (ESV)

This passage is straightforward requiring little further exposition. One thing we should note is that although Genesis 34:19 says that Shechem the son of Hamor was the “***most honored of all his father's house***,” that doesn't imply that Shechem was honorable or righteous. After all, he was a rapist. That alone is sufficient cause for dishonor.

Genesis 34 – Dinah and Shechem

Yet Shechem was the son of the prince of the land as we know from Genesis 34:2. In this respect, I believe the KJV and NKJV missed the mark in translating this verse. Both say that Shechem was more honorable than everyone else in his father's household (although the KJV uses the British spelling – honourable). Other English language translations say, "**most honored**," "**more respected**," "**most important**," and "**highly respected**." I think these capture the sense of the verse more accurately. Shechem's words carried weight with the men of the city, and they showed deference to him because of his position, not due to his sterling character.

It is clear from Hamor's words that he had fully taken the bait of the trap laid for him and his people by the sons of Jacob. But before we feel too sorry for him and the men of Shechem, note that Hamor convinced the men of the city to go along with the plan by appealing to their greed, saying that if the Hittites took Israelite wives and offered their own daughters as wives for the Israelites, then the men of Shechem would obtain the Israelites' wealth in the bargain. They hoped to sell their daughters to the Israelites for monetary gain, but things didn't quite work out that way as we shall see.

²⁵On the third day, when they were sore, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city while it felt secure and killed all the males. ²⁶They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went away. ²⁷The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister. ²⁸They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. ²⁹All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and plundered. Genesis 34:25-29 (ESV)

Clearly, Jacob and Leah's second and third sons Simeon and Levi were the main perpetrators of the murders of the men of Shechem – exacting their revenge for Shechem's rape of their sister. But it seems that *all* of Jacob's sons partook in looting the city and taking its women and children captive. Without doubt, this plundering went beyond avenging their sister's rape. Jacob's sons allowed their greed to rule over them and brought dishonor upon *all* the Israelites in place of whatever misguided honor they might have received for avenging Dinah's rape.

Nevertheless, many years later Jacob singled out Simeon and Levi for chastisement about these despicable murders as he was pronouncing his final "blessings" upon his sons.

⁵"Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. ⁶Let my soul come not into their council; O my glory, be not joined to their company. For in their anger they killed men, and in their willfulness they hamstringed oxen. ⁷Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel. Genesis 49:5-7 (ESV)

What did Jacob mean when he said, "***I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel?***"

Genesis 34 – Dinah and Shechem

Look at the map – Allotment of Canaan.



Allotment of Canaan

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Genesis 34 – Dinah and Shechem

Jacob gave this “blessing” to his sons while the Israelites were living in Egypt in the land of Goshen. It was nearly 500 years later when they conquered and divided the land of Canaan. Notice that the tribal allocation for Simeon lies entirely within the allocation for Judah. Thus, Simeon is “divided” in Jacob. Of course, there is no tribal allocation for Levi – the priestly tribe. Their inheritance was the ministry of the sacrificial atonement system and other ceremonial services defined under the Law of Moses. No tribal allocation was made for them in the land under the Law. Instead, the Levites were given cities and small agricultural plots within lands allocated to the other tribes. Thus, Levi was “scattered” in Israel.

30Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. My numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household.” 31But they said, “Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?” Genesis 34:30-31 (ESV)

Notice that Jacob’s objection to the despicable murders committed by Simeon and Levi wasn’t due to any compassion for the people of Shechem who were victimized. Rather, Jacob was thinking of himself – the safety, security, and prosperity of his own family dwelling among the Canaanites. Recall that Jacob was already a landowner in that area (Genesis 33:19-20).

But surely, Jacob must have suspected that Simeon and Levi had something up their sleeves when they first proposed that the men of Shechem be circumcised. Why didn’t Jacob speak up then privately to his sons rather than wait until *after* they had perpetrated this heinous crime before he said anything about it? Perhaps Jacob also smelled the spoils to be obtained from Shechem after the slaughter and simply let his sons do his dirty work for him before taking his “fair” share of the booty.

For their part, Simeon and Levi still believed the vengeful murder of the men of Shechem was justified to restore the “honor” of their sister Dinah. In short, none of the characters in this sordid little drama acted righteously or honorably except Dinah herself.

Looking Ahead

Next time, we’ll see that God commanded Jacob to leave Shechem and go to Bethel where God formally renamed Jacob as Israel. Then we’ll look at the sad story of Rachel’s death while giving birth to Jacob’s youngest son Benjamin.