



Genesis - Chapter Thirty Four

II. Genesis 11:27-50:26 - Patriarchal History (continues)

II.b Genesis 25:19-36:43 - Isaac's Descendants (continues)

Summary of Chapter Thirty Four

Dinah, the daughter of Leah, perhaps through lack of female companionship of her own age, sought out the local women of Shechem. This took her away from the protection of her family and she was raped by the son of Hamor, also called Shechem. However, he asked his father to arrange a marriage with Dinah.

When Jacob heard of the rape he was naturally furious but he took no action until his sons arrived home. Hamor tried to appease their anger by offering a high bride price for the wedding between Dinah and Shechem. In addition, he wanted the family to remain in the region and trade with the locals.

However, the sons of Jacob hatched a deceitful plan, saying that Dinah could not marry a man that was uncircumcised and that all the men of Shechem would need to be circumcised as well to meet their requirements. Hamor agreed to this and persuaded all the men it was in their financial interest to comply and all the men were subsequently circumcised.

On the third day, when the men were at their weakest due to the surgery, Simeon and Levi attacked and killed all the men, taking Dinah back with them to the family. The rest of the sons then went into the city and plundered it, taking all the livestock along with the women and children as slaves. Jacob objected to their behaviour because he feared retribution from the other Canaanites, but the brothers were unrepentant because Dinah had been treated like a whore in their eyes.

II.b.xviii Genesis 34:1-24 - The Rape of Dinah

Almost as soon as Jacob returns to Canaan, an incident threatens the future security of his whole family. His daughter Dinah was raped by Shechem, the son of the prince of the region. However, Shechem desired to have Dinah as his own and his father Hamor sought to agree a marriage. Jacob's sons were seeking revenge for their sister by agreeing to the marriage only if all the men of the city were first circumcised so that the two groups could become one large family. Due to the perceived financial gain they would receive by trading with Jacob's wealthy family, all the men readily agreed.

¹ Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the region.

Genesis 34:1

Now Dinah the daughter of Leah. This chapter contains one of the most shameful incidents in Israel's history. When the Bible shows its leaders and heroes in such terrible, plain truth, it can be known for sure that it is a book from God. Men do not normally write about themselves and their ancestors like this.

Dinah's association with the women of the region or land possibly carries negative connotations. The only other occurrence of this expression in Genesis comes in 27:46, when Rebekah speaks out against Jacob's marrying <<*one of the women of the land*>>. It seems likely that Dinah lacked female company of her own age and sought it with the local community, leaving the safety of her family in order to do so. The fault is not Dinah's alone as her parents, Jacob and Leah, had primary responsibility for her care, particularly in this pagan region.

It should be remembered that Jacob brought his family to a place God didn't really want them to be. It seems God directed him to return to Bethel (31:13), and his time spent in the city of Shechem did much harm to his family. Jacob chose a place to live for all the wrong reasons. He wanted to be close to the city (33:18), though the city was ungodly. God called him to Bethel. Jacob's poor choice of a place to live left his family open to ungodly influence.

² When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the region, saw her, he seized her and lay with her by force. ³ And his soul was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the girl, and spoke tenderly to her. ⁴ So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, 'Get me this girl to be my wife.'

Genesis 34:2-4

Hamor the Hivite, prince of the region, was clearly a figure of some importance in Shechem. His status later allowed him to persuade all the men of the city to be circumcised. While Hamor's son Shechem is initially drawn to Dinah by lust and rapes her - he seized her and lay with her by force, he then desired to hold on to her as his wife. His actions indicate that it could not have been love but pure desire that drove his reasoning to want to marry Dinah.

So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, 'Get me this girl to be my wife.' Culturally, it was the role of the fathers to negotiate the terms of the marriage, irrespective of the feelings of those who were to be wed. This is reflected in the account of Samson: <<*Then he came up, and told his father and mother, 'I saw a Philistine woman at Timnah; now get her for me as my wife.'* But his father and mother said to him, 'Is there not a woman among your kin, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?' But Samson said to his father, 'Get her for me, because she pleases me'>> (Judges 14:2-3). Such arranged marriages were often politically or financially motivated. In the case of Ishmael it was his mother who arranged his marriage for him: <<*He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt*>> (Genesis 21:21).

⁵ Now Jacob heard that Shechem had defiled his daughter Dinah; but his sons were with his cattle in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came. ⁶ And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him, ⁷ just as the sons of Jacob came in from the field. When they heard of it, the men were indignant and very angry, because he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done.

Genesis 34:5-7

Jacob held his peace until they came. It should be imagined that Jacob would have been naturally angry at what had happened but did not react to the news, waiting instead until his sons returned from their work tending to his cattle in the field. The elder sons were by now in a position to take some of the decisions for the family and it seems Jacob wanted them to do so here.

Jacob showed a distinct lack of outrage here. He seemed to take the defilement of his only daughter easily. His refusal to do what is right in regard to his family will encourage two of his sons to do something, something ungodly in response. When God-appointed heads do not take appropriate leadership, it creates a void, which is so often filled sinfully.

The sons of Jacob were indignant and very angry. Dinah's brothers are justifiably enraged at the way Shechem has treated their sister. Such anger often leads to retribution, whether or not it is justified, something that Joseph would face in Egypt: <<*When his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, saying, 'This is the way your servant treated me', he became enraged*>> (Genesis 39:19). David felt this way, not knowing that he was the target of his own anger: <<*Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, 'As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die'*>> (2 Samuel 12:5), but it was also such anger that would justifiably save the lives of Mordecai and the Jewish nation: <<*The king rose from the feast in wrath and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that the king had determined to destroy him*>> (Esther 7:7).

For such a thing ought not to be done. Rape is a terrible thing and should not be accepted in any society. A similar phrase is used in the sad case where David's son Amnon rapes his sister Tamar: <<*But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her, 'Come, lie with me, my sister.' She answered him, 'No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile! As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel. Now therefore, I beg you, speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you.'* But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she was, he forced her and lay with her>> (2 Samuel 13:11-14). That incident not only brought Tamar to despair but would lead to the death of Amnon at the hands of his brother Absalom and would tear apart the whole family.

⁸ But Hamor spoke with them, saying, 'The heart of my son Shechem longs for your daughter; please give her to him in marriage. ⁹ Make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. ¹⁰ You shall live with us; and the land shall be open to you; live and trade in it, and get property in it.'

Genesis 34:8-10

Hamor spoke with them. Although Hamor came to speak to Jacob (v.6), the latter appears to be pushed aside by his sons. They are the ones who engage in discussion with Hamor and Shechem.

The heart of my son Shechem longs for your daughter; please give her to him in marriage. Hamor makes no apology for his son's behaviour but focuses on the marriage and all the benefits that would bring to the two families.

Make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. This was a dangerous challenge to Jacob and his family. Irresponsible

intermarriage with the Canaanites could prove especially harmful for this family with such a destiny in God's redemptive plan.

Both Abraham and Isaac had taken great care to ensure that their heirs would marry women from the right background but Jacob was not as diligent. The rest of Genesis will show that trouble lay ahead for this family because of the decisions they made apart from the will of God. Their later descendants would be specifically warned against such a practice: <<*Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children 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), and: <<*For if you turn back, and join the survivors of these nations left here among you, and intermarry with them, so that you marry their women and they yours, know assuredly that the LORD your God will not continue to drive out these nations before you; but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a scourge on your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land that the LORD your God has given you*>> (Joshua 23:12-13).

¹¹ Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, 'Let me find favour with you, and whatever you say to me I will give. ¹² Put the marriage present and gift as high as you like, and I will give whatever you ask me; only give me the girl to be my wife.'

Genesis 34:11-12

Whatever you say to me I will give. In an attempt to win over Dinah's family, Shechem now speaks out and offers a generous bride price or marriage present and gift. This was a normal part of marriage arrangements in the ancient Near East. He is willing to give them whatever they ask.

Although Shechem desired to have Dinah for his wife, his type of conduct would later require him to marry the woman by law: <<*When a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged to be married, and lies with her, he shall give the bride-price for her and make her his wife*>> (Exodus 22:16).

¹³ The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah.

Genesis 34:13

Deceitfully. The Hebrew term used here, *mirmah*, implies treachery. Although Jacob's sons resemble their father, whose name means 'he deceives' (25:26), their actions here are about to go beyond anything he has done.

¹⁴ They 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. ¹⁵ Only on this condition will we consent to you: that you will become as we are and every male among you be circumcised. ¹⁶ Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters for ourselves, and we will live among you and become one people. ¹⁷ But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and be gone.’

Genesis 34:14-17

Only on this condition will we consent to you. As a precondition for marriage between Dinah and Shechem, her brothers request that all the men of Shechem become circumcised; refer to the comment made on 17:11. In Chapter Seventeen circumcision is introduced as the sign of the eternal covenant that God established with Abraham. Those who are circumcised acknowledge Abraham as their father. While Jacob’s sons are right to insist that circumcision is necessary in order for both groups to become one people, their intention, as revealed in subsequent events, is otherwise.

The laws surrounding the taking of the Passover meal would later require that a foreigner and his entire household would need to be circumcised in order to participate: <<*If an alien who resides with you wants to celebrate the passover to the LORD, all his males shall be circumcised; then he may draw near to celebrate it; he shall be regarded as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it*>> (Exodus 12:48). This indicates that God is not against the circumcision of foreigners but it is the purpose of the required circumcision that is the issue here.

¹⁸ Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor’s son Shechem. ¹⁹ And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he was delighted with Jacob’s daughter. Now he was the most honoured of all his family. ²⁰ So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying, ²¹ ‘These people are friendly with us; let them live in the land and trade in it, for the land is large enough for them; let us take their daughters in marriage, and let us give them our daughters. ²² Only on this condition will they agree to live among us, to become one people: that every male among us be circumcised as they are circumcised. ²³ Will not their livestock, their property, and all their animals be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will live among us.’ ²⁴ And all who went out of the city gate

heeded Hamor and his son Shechem; and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

Genesis 34:18-24

Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem. Despite the obvious sacrifice involved, Hamor and Shechem were pleased with this plan. Beyond the obviously deep attraction Shechem had for Dinah, they were also undoubtedly pleased to begin to marry into a family so large, wealthy and influential.

Now he was the most honoured of all his family. This most likely means that he was the firstborn son and the heir to his father's estate: <<*Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honour, excelling in power*>> (Genesis 49:3 NIV), although such honour is also bestowed according to one's deeds: <<*Abishai the brother of Joab was chief of the Three. He raised his spear against three hundred men, whom he killed, and so he became as famous as the Three. He was doubly honoured above the Three and became their commander, even though he was not included among them*>> (1 Chronicles 11:20-21 NIV).

Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men. The city gates were the traditional meeting places where the people would gather to discuss important issues. This is reflected when Boaz needed witnesses for his transaction to become the kinsman redeemer for Naomi: <<*No sooner had Boaz gone up to the gate and sat down there than the next-of-kin, of whom Boaz had spoken, came passing by. So Boaz said, 'Come over, friend; sit down here.'* And he went over and sat down. Then Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, 'Sit down here'; so they sat down>> (Ruth 4:1-2).

These people are friendly with us. Hamor and his son Shechem are utterly deceived by Jacob's sons.

Will not their livestock, their property, and all their animals be ours? It is amazing what men will do for both women and wealth. A whole city of men submits to circumcision so they can take their daughters in marriage and take their livestock, their property, and all their animals as well.

II.b.xix Genesis 34:25-31 - Dinah's Brothers Avenge Their Sister

While the rape of Dinah by Shechem is inexcusable, the punishment meted out by Simeon and Levi far exceeds the crime. While they are reluctant to acknowledge any fault on their part, Jacob is very conscious of how their actions have endangered his entire household. Furthermore, circumcision, which was intended by God to bring divine blessing, leads on this occasion to death and destruction. All of this takes place without any reference to God.

²⁵ On the third day, when they were still in pain, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city unawares, and killed all the males. ²⁶ They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went away.

Genesis 34:25-26

On the third day, when they were still in pain. The men had no experience in carrying out this surgery. If crudely performed, circumcision could be quite incapacitating, particularly after two or three days.

Two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi. Although all of Jacob's sons were involved in the deception of Hamor and Shechem, only Simeon and Levi were involved in the slaughter of all the males. While all the brothers are involved in plundering the city, Jacob later attaches particular guilt to Simeon and Levi for the massacre of the men of Shechem (v.30). This is later reflected in 49:5-7 and explains why both brothers are passed over in favour of their younger sibling Judah. Although it was not known at the time, it would be the descendants of Levi who would become the priests and other servants in God's tabernacle and temple.

Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city unawares. The inhabitants of Shechem had no idea they were about to be attacked so that, along with their physical incapacity, they made easy prey for the attack, as did the people of Laish many generations later at the hands of Dan's descendants: <<*The Danites, having taken what Micah had made, and the priest who belonged to him, came to Laish, to a people quiet and unsuspecting, put them to the sword, and burned down the city*>> (Judges 18:27).

This was not only a brutal, deceptive act, but it also disgraced God's covenant of circumcision. Surely, with this clever act of violent deception, Simeon and Levi showed themselves to be the children of Jacob from a bitter, competitive home environment.

They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword. Certainly, they justified this murder and theft by saying they and their sister had been disgraced, but the punishment clearly does not fit the crime.

²⁷ And the other sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled. ²⁸ They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. ²⁹ All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and made their prey.

Genesis 34:27-29

The other sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city. With all the men dead, the other nine brothers now join in by robbing and looting. They stole all the livestock and took the women and children as slaves.

Plunder and looting are actions normally associated with war or perhaps civil disobedience, although God would command that it would be the actions taken against his people for their disobedience to him: <<*The LORD said through his servants the prophets: “Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols. Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. I will stretch out over Jerusalem the measuring line used against Samaria and the plumb line used against the house of Ahab. I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance and give them into the hands of enemies. They will be looted and plundered by all their enemies; they have done evil in my eyes and have aroused my anger from the day their ancestors came out of Egypt until this day”*>> (2 Kings 21:10-15 NIV). It seems that nothing was learned from this incident.

³⁰ Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, ‘You have brought trouble on me by making me odious 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.’ ³¹ But they said, ‘Should our sister be treated like a whore?’

Genesis 34:30-31

Jacob’s condemnation of Simeon and Levi focuses not on the morality of their actions but on the possible consequences for his household. Out of anger at what has happened, the Canaanites and the Perizzites may attack Jacob’s household.

Should our sister be treated like a whore? Simeon and Levi were correct in their reasoning that Dinah should not have been treated the way she had been but this was no justification for the level of retribution they brought upon this people.

Although the killing of Shechem could be justified because of the rape, the rest of the deaths that followed can only be considered as murder and is totally unjustifiable. In addition, they took the women and children as slaves and stole all the livestock. This was a very sad day in the history of God’s chosen people.