

Genesis
Chapter Thirty-Four

- Dinah and the Shechemites

Dinah and the Shechemites Verses 1-31

The story of Jacob, starting in chapter twenty-five and extending to chapter thirty-five, has many questionable decisions and actions. Amazingly these stories are not stories of fiction; they are real. Genesis thirty-three ended with Jacob buying from the sons of Hamor, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent (33:19). There is a time gap between chapters thirty-three and thirty-four. In this time gap, Dinah, the daughter of the unloved Leah, has grown up. Many wonder why is this chapter/event in the Bible? What can we possibly learn from this section? Not attempting to make *any* excuse for this event, it has to be pointed out that Jacob brought his family to a region in the Promised Land that God did not want them to be in. Jacob was not where God wanted him to be geographically or spiritually. God directed Jacob to return to Bethel (31:13). His time spent in the city of Shechem did much harm to his family. Notice, God speaks to Jacob in chapter thirty-three and in chapter thirty-five, but there is no known communication between God and Jacob in chapter thirty-four.

Verses 1-5

“Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. ² When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and raped her. ³ His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. ⁴ And Shechem said to his father Hamor, “Get me this girl as my wife.” ⁵ When Jacob heard that his daughter Dinah had been defiled, his sons were in the fields with his livestock; so he did nothing about it until they came home.”

This whole section begins with impropriety. Dinah “*went out*” which suggests she acted against and behind her mother’s wishes and knowledge. Culturally, girls of marriable age were not to leave their family tents to go visit without a chaperone. Shechem was the son of the king. He was a prince and could have asked his father to get him any girl he wanted. That was the way that culture worked. In Canaanite cities, promiscuity was not only common but considered a part of the religious system itself. To say this city had low standards of morals would be stating the facts gently. In truth, in this culture, any unattended female could be raped, and neither the father nor the son would feel the need to apologize for the violation which had been committed.

David’s family also had to deal with a rape. In that ugliness, hatred was the end result.

2 Samuel 13:15

*“Amnon **hated her with intense hatred.** In fact, **he hated her more than he had loved her.** Amnon said to her, “Get up and get out!”*

¹⁶ *“No!” she said to him. “Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me.” But he refused to listen to her. ¹⁷ He called his personal servant and said, “**Get this woman out of my sight** and bolt the door after her.”*

In Shechem’s situation, after he violated Dinah, he claimed he loved her and wanted her as his wife. Shockingly, Jacob failed to stand up for his daughter or his God.

Verses 6-12

“⁶ Then Shechem’s father Hamor went out to talk with Jacob. ⁷ Meanwhile, Jacob’s sons had come in from the fields as soon as they heard what had happened. They were

shocked and furious, because Shechem had done an outrageous thing in Israel by sleeping with Jacob's daughter—a thing that should not be done. ⁸ But Hamor said to them, "My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as his wife. ⁹ Intermarry with us; give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. ¹⁰ You can settle among us; the land is open to you. Live in it, trade in it, and acquire property in it." ¹¹ Then Shechem said to Dinah's father and brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and I will give you whatever you ask. ¹² Make the price for the bride and the gift I am to bring as great as you like, and I'll pay whatever you ask me. Only give me the young woman as my wife."

Jacob's refusal to do what was right regarding his daughter, encouraged her two brothers to do something in response. Hamor and Shechem sought to arrange the marriage of Dinah. For Jacob's family, and the role they plan in God's plan, intermarriage with the Canaanites was not an option. Remember, both Abraham and Isaac (and Rebekah) sent their sons *outside* of Canaan to find wives so that there would be a distinction between the descendants of Abraham and the Canaanites. Hamor thought the offer of money, land, or possessions could not make the disgrace go away. Both the Canaanite father and son expected an immediate acceptance.

Verses 13-25

"Because their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob's sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Hamor. ¹⁴ They said to them, "We can't do such a thing; we can't give our sister to a man who is not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us. ¹⁵ We will enter into an agreement with you on one condition only: that you become like us by circumcising all your males. ¹⁶ Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We'll settle among you and become one people with you. ¹⁷ But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we'll take our sister and go." ¹⁸ Their proposal seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem. ¹⁹ The young man, who was the most honored of all his father's family, lost no time in doing what they said, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. ²⁰ So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city to speak to the men of their city. ²¹ "These men are friendly toward us," they said. "Let them live in our land and trade in it; the land has plenty of room for them. We can marry their daughters and they can marry ours. ²² But the men will agree to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised, as they themselves are. ²³ Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us agree to their terms, and they will settle among us. All the men who went out of the city gate agreed with Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male in the city was circumcised."

Simeon and Levi planned evil against Shechem and Hamor and their people because they treated Dinah, their sister as a prostitute (Vs 31). Jacob's sons' response was a calculated deception because if the Canaanites agreed to their terms, the brothers knew there would be a period of time where all the Canaanite men in the camp would be weakened to fight as they recovered from being circumcised. The irony of this plan is the anatomy that caused this violation is also what leads to their death. These brothers, by using circumcision to gain revenge, end up desecrating the covenant signed between God and Israel.

Hamor and Shechem were pleased with this plan because marrying into this family would increase their own wealth and influence. The Canaanite father and son convinced the men of their community to yield to the practice of circumcision, convincing them it was worth it because of the potential gain of wealth. Their agreeing to circumcision removed the barrier of greater wealth.

Verses 25-29

“²⁵ Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob’s sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. ²⁶ They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem’s house and left. ²⁷ The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled. ²⁸ They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. ²⁹ They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses”

Yes, Simeon and Levi are guilty of committing a violent act of deception. There was no sparing of the sword, but in doing so they also disgraced God’s covenant of circumcision. After this procedure, the third day is the most painful and incapacitating, a fact these brothers knew well. The brothers brought the guilt of murder onto a family who God had set apart as an example of holiness. Adding to this deceit, the sons of Jacob plundered the city of Shechem, to the point of taking the surviving women and children as slaves.

Verses 30-31

“³⁰ Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have brought trouble on me by making me obnoxious to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed.” ³¹ But they replied, “Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?”

Jacob was guilty of deceiving his father in receiving the blessing of his older brother Esau. Jacob was then deceived by his uncle Laban. Now he sees the family deceitfulness continue in the acts of his sons. In response to his son’s planned deceit, acts of violence and plundering of Shechem, Jacob seemed to be only concerned about himself and the possible danger of retribution from other people. Unbelievably it is not what Jacob said, but what he did not say. There was no concern for God’s plan or His call for living righteously. There was no rebuke for the uncalled-for massacre. Jacob’s reactions to all these situations may be WHY he is called Jacob in this chapter and not Israel. His response and interaction were in the flesh not in the spirit. Jacob’s disobedience of not going to Bethel, as he was told, lead to all the grotesque sin this chapter holds.

His rebuke of his sons comes way to late. It is not until he is on his death bed, and he prophesizes over each of his sons. This is what he said about Simeon and Levi: **Genesis 49:5-7**
*“Simeon and Levi are brothers— their swords are weapons of violence.
6 Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased.
7 Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel!
I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.”*

Genesis

Chapter Thirty-Five

- Jacob Returns to Bethel
- The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac

Jacob Returns to Bethel Verses 1-15

Verses 1-5

“Then God said to Jacob, “Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.”² So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes.”³ Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone.”⁴ So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem.⁵ Then they set out, and the terror of God fell on the towns all around them so that no one pursued them.”

This chapter opens with God speaking to Jacob, once again giving him the command to travel twenty miles to Bethel. As he did thirty years earlier in Genesis 29, Jacob is to build an altar at Bethel, meaning his first task will be to worship. The circumstances at Shechem have caused Jacob to get right with God. By him leading, his children follow. The family give up all the “*foreign gods*”, one may ask why would they even have these? The answer would be because their mother did. Rachel kept her father’s household gods (31:19). As for the earrings, archaeological excavations have unearthed crescent shaped earrings symbolizing and celebrating pagan gods such as the pagan moon god.

The family discards all foreign objects of worship and they “*purified themselves*” (after the defilement through contact with dead corpses) and changed clothes. This was an important step. In Scripture the changing of garments is a sign of a change in character. Dirty or polluted garments represent one’s polluted way of life.

Jude 23

“Save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.”

Ephesians 4:22-24

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Romans 13:14

“... clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh

Verses 6-8

“Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan.⁷ There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel, because it was there that God revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.⁸ Now Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died and was buried under the oak outside Bethel. So it was named Allon Bakuth.”

In an act of grace, God protects Jacob and his family as they leave Shechem and travel to Bethel. This path could have been a dangerous journey, but it would have been more dangerous to disobey God. I can't help but to wonder, upon arrival did Jacob seek out the spot he had made an altar at when he first came to Bethel? Would it still be there? El Bethel means God of Bethel.

Genesis 28:16-21

"When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." ¹⁷ He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

¹⁸ Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. ¹⁹ He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz. ²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear ²¹ so that I return safely to my father's household, then the LORD will be my God

As for Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, we do not know more about her than what is given here and possibly in 24:59. It is safe to assume she was a beloved member of the family, because they named the place where she was buried "*Allon Bakuth*", which means "*Oak of Weeping*."

Verses 9-15

"After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. ¹⁰ God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel.

¹¹ And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will be among your descendants. ¹² The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you." ¹³ Then God went up from him at the place where he had talked with him. ¹⁴ Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. ¹⁵ Jacob called the place where God had talked with him Bethel."

After obeying God, Jacob receives a blessing from God. As He did with Abram, changing his name to Abraham, God reminds Jacob that his name is Israel. Jacob means 'deceiver'; Israel means "*Fights or wrestles with God*". God calls Himself *El Shaddai*, God Almighty. He is the One who fulfills every promise. He is the God of power and strength. Like with Abraham, God's blessing is a blessing of fruitfulness, both in land and people. Nations shall come from you, kings shall come from you, a thousand years later King David comes from this line and a thousand years after that King Jesus comes from this line, fulfilling this promised blessing.

With this relationship being restored, God reminds Jacob that his name is Israel. Jacob had been living and acting as Jacob, he now needs to remember that God has called him and his ways need to change. The name change is a reminder that the old Jacob is done, the new Israel is to go forth. In this section, Jacob has had his family cleanse themselves of worthless idols, purified themselves, put on new clothing (representing a new character), and obey God going to

the place he was originally told to go, builds God an altar and worships his Lord. The results of all that was a blessing from God and the establishing of a renewed purpose.

The LORD reminds Israel of his heritage, going back to his grandfather Abraham, and the LORD reminds Israel that the land he is in was promised to him and his future offspring as an inheritance.

The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac **Verses 16-29**

Verses 16-21

“Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty.¹⁷ And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, “Don’t despair, for you have another son.”¹⁸ As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin.¹⁹ So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).²⁰ Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel’s tomb.²¹ Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder.”

We are not told how long Jacob stayed at Bethel, but it is possible this last child was conceived at this place where Jacob came back to his first love, the LORD. As Rachel was giving birth she named her son, Ben-Oni, which, means “*son of my sorrow*.” Jacob changed the son’s name to Benjamin, which means “*son of my right hand*.” The right side is the side considered to have more strength and thus more honor. Jacob naming his son Benjamin means he saw the child as a son of strength or a son of honor.

Exodus 15:6

“Your right hand, Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, Lord, shattered the enemy.”

Psalm 16:8

“I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.”

Psalm 63:8

“I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.”

Psalm 138:7

“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life. You stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes; with your right hand you save me.”

Colossians 3:1

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”

Jacob loved Rachel from the moment he saw her. He removed the stone at the well so she could water her sheep and joyfully worked seven years to have her hand in marriage. But, was

Rachel's death the fulfillment of Jacob's curse he pronounced on the one who stole Laban's idols, not knowing it was Rachel who stole them?

Genesis 31:31-32

*“31 Jacob answered Laban, “I was afraid, because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force. 32 But **if you find anyone who has your gods, that person shall not live**. In the presence of our relatives, see for yourself whether there is anything of yours here with me; and if so, take it.” Now **Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.**”*

In Genesis 30, Rachel pleaded with Jacob, “Give me children, or else I die.” Both became true. She had children and she died as a result.

Verses 22-26

“²² While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it.

Jacob had twelve sons:

²³ The sons of Leah: Reuben the firstborn of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun.

²⁴ The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.

²⁵ The sons of Rachel's servant Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali.

²⁶ The sons of Leah's servant Zilpah: Gad and Asher.

These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram.”

Reuben, the firstborn, sinned against his father and the entire family. Jacob loved Rachel over Leah (Reuben's mother). Bilhah was Rachel's servant. Could Jacob now place Bilhah, a servant, over Leah? Is this why Reuben purposefully seduced her? (There is a cultural claim of authority of the inheritance, meaning the possession of a concubine could validate succession of the inheritance, see Abner in 2 Samuel 3:7-8). We do not know why Reuben did what he did, but we do know because of their sins, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi disqualify themselves from the high calling of Abraham's blessing, which meant the blessing of bringing forth the Messiah falls to the fourth son, Judah.

Verses 27-29

“²⁷ Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. ²⁸ Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. ²⁹ Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

Twenty years earlier, Jacob left his home thinking his father would soon die. Jacob probably never expected to see his father again before he died. Before his death, Jacob and Isaac are reunited and the brothers Jacob and Esau are reunited.