

The Book of Genesis

Chapter 34

Focus on Jacob's Family

The children of Jacob now become the focus for the remainder of Genesis. The accompanying theme is that God can achieve what He wants regardless of the self-serving plans of humans.

34:1 Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. (NIV)

Dinah & Shechem

Josephus says Dinah went to see the fine clothing worn by the local women during a special festival celebration [Antiquities, I.XXI.1]. Dinah would have been between 15 and 20 years old.

34:2 When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and violated her [TAN, NRS: "lay with her by force]. (NIV)

Surely, Shechem, being son of the ruler in that area, had never been denied anything, and thought he could take whatever he wanted.

34:3-5 His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her. And Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as my wife." When Jacob heard that his daughter Dinah had been defiled, his sons were in the fields with his livestock; so he kept quiet about it until they came home. (NIV)

34:6 Meanwhile Shechem's father Hamor came out to Jacob to talk the matter over with him. (REB)

34:7 Now Jacob's sons had come in from the fields as soon as they heard what had happened. They were filled with grief and fury, because Shechem had done a disgraceful thing in Israel [can also be translated: "against Israel"] by lying with Jacob's daughter—a thing that should not be done. (NIV)

Individual vs. Nation

The sons of Jacob were already considering themselves a people or nation, instead of individuals.

34:8-10 But Hamor said to them, "My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as his wife. Intermarry with us; give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. You can settle among us; the land is open to you. Live in it, trade in it, and acquire property in it." (NIV)

Intermarriage

He was offering them the opportunity to be absorbed into the Hivite nation, which would mean losing their identity as a separate people.

34:11-14 Then Shechem said to Dinah's father and brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and I will give you whatever you ask. 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 girl as my wife." Because their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob's sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Hamor. 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. (NIV)

Marriage Negotiations

Dinah's brothers were negotiating the conditions of marriage, not Jacob. Hamor had come to negotiate marriage with Dinah's father, as the Canaanite practice was, but found himself negotiating with Dinah's brothers instead, which followed the Mesopotamian custom.

34:15-19 We will give our consent to you on one condition only: that you become like us by circumcising all your males. Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We'll settle among you and become one people with you. But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we'll take our sister and go." Their proposal seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem. The young man, who was the most honored of all his father's household, lost no time in doing what they said, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. (NIV)

Shechem

It becomes clear that Shechem had been spoiled, always getting everything he wanted. His upbringing created his unbridled selfishness which exhibited itself when he raped Dinah.

34:20-23 So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city to speak to their fellow townsmen. "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. But the men will consent to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised, as they themselves are. Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us give our consent to them, and they will settle among us." (NIV)

Consent for Circumcision

Hamor and Shechem were being deceitful with Jacob's sons, and at the same time used the greed of their own people to entice them to be circumcised.

34:24-26 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. 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. They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem's house and left. (NIV)

An Avenging Slaughter

Josephus tells us that not only were the men too sore to resist, but this was also during the festival when excessive eating and drinking dulled their awareness.

34:27 The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled.

Although Simeon and Levi were responsible for the slaughter, all the sons joined in plundering the spoils, with the exception of Joseph, who would have only been six or seven years old. The next oldest brother in the birth order would have been Zebulun, who was at least ten years older than Joseph.

34:28-31 They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses. Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench 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." But they replied, "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?" (NIV)

Honor

They reminded Jacob that the family honor was at stake, as well as the need to restore their sister's honor.