

The Dinah Narrative (Genesis 34): Moral Ambiguities in a Dreadful Story

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Genesis chapter 34

¹Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. ²Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, and took her and lay with her by force. ³Being strongly drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden, he spoke to the maiden tenderly. ⁴So Shechem said to his father Hamor, “Get me this girl as a wife.”

⁵Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah; but since his sons were in the field with his cattle, Jacob kept silent until they came home. ⁶Then Shechem’s father Hamor came out to Jacob to speak to him. ⁷Meanwhile Jacob’s sons, having heard the news, came in from the field. The men were distressed and very angry, because he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob’s daughter—a thing not to be done.

⁸And Hamor spoke with them, saying, “My son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him in marriage. ⁹Intermarry with us: give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves: ¹⁰You will dwell among us, and the land will be open before you; settle, move about, and acquire holdings in it.” ¹¹Then Shechem said to her father and brothers, “Do me this favor, and I will pay whatever you tell me. ¹²Ask of me a bride-price ever so high, as well as gifts, and I will pay what you tell me; only give me the maiden for a wife.”

¹³Jacob’s sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor—speaking with guile because he had defiled their sister Dinah—¹⁴and said to them, “We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised, for that is a disgrace among us. ¹⁵Only on this condition will we agree with you; that you will become like us in that every male among you is circumcised. ¹⁶Then we will give our daughters to you and take your daughters to ourselves; and we will dwell among you and become as one kindred. ¹⁷But if you will not listen to us and become circumcised, we will take our daughter and go.”

¹⁸Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor’s son Shechem. ¹⁹And the youth lost no time in doing the thing, for he wanted Jacob’s daughter. Now he was the most respected in his father’s house. ²⁰So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the public place of their town and spoke to their fellow townsmen, saying, ²¹“These people are our friends; let them settle in the land and move about in it, for the land is large enough for them; we will take their daughters to ourselves as wives and give our daughters to them. ²²But only on this condition will the men agree with us to dwell among us and be as one kindred: that all our males become circumcised as they are circumcised. ²³Their cattle and substance and all their beasts will be ours, if we only agree to their terms, so that they will settle

among us.”²⁴All who went out of the gate of his town heeded Hamor and his son Shechem, and all males, all those who went out of the gate of his town, were circumcised.

²⁵On the third day, when they were in pain, Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob’s sons, brothers of Dinah, took each his sword, came upon the city unmolested, and slew all the males. ²⁶They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword, took Dinah out of Shechem’s house, and went away. ²⁷The other sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the town, because their sister had been defiled. ²⁸They seized their flocks and herds and asses, all that was inside the town and outside; ²⁹all their wealth, all their children, and their wives, all that was in the houses, they took as captives and booty.

³⁰Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have brought trouble on me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my men are few in number, so that if they unite against me and attack me, I and my house will be destroyed.” ³¹But they answered, “Should our sister be treated like a whore?”

Genesis chapter 35

¹God said to Jacob, “Arise, go up to Bethel and remain there; and build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.”...⁵As they set out, a terror from God fell on the cities round about, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

Genesis chapter 49

⁵Simeon and Levi are a pair; their weapons are tools of lawlessness. ⁶Let not my person be included in their council, let not my being be counted in their assembly. For when angry they slay men, and when pleased they maim oxen. ⁷Cursed be their anger so fierce, and their wrath so relentless. I will divide them in Jacob, scatter them in Israel.