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.” 24 All 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.

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

30 Jacob 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.” 31 But they answered, “Should our sister be treated like a whore?”

### Genesis chapter 35

1 God 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.” … 5 As 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

5 Simeon and Levi are a pair; their weapons are tools of lawlessness. 6 Let 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. 7 Cursed be their anger so fierce, and their wrath so relentless. I will divide them in Jacob, scatter them in Israel.