

Genesis 34 The Slaughter of Shechem

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Overview

Structurally, this chapter is parallel to ch. 26.

Birth of Sons	25, Jacob and Esau	35, Benjamin
Relations with the People of the Land	26, Isaac in Gerar	34, Jacob in Shechem
Alienation and Reconciliation with Esau	27:1-28:9	33
Jacob Meets with God	28:10-22	32
Jacob comes to, and departs from, Padan-Aram and Laban	29:1-14	31
Each out-bargains the other	29:15-30, for wives	30:25-43, for flocks
The birth of Jacob's Children	29:31-30:24	

Similarities

	Chapter 26	Chapter 34
Abuse by people of the land	15-21, Strife over water; Philistines stopped wells	2, Shechem violates Dinah
Deception by the chosen people	7-11, Isaac lies about Rebekah's being his wife	13-28, Simeon and Levi violate a covenant and slay the men of Shechem
Marital abuse	7-11, Isaac lies about Rebekah's being his wife	2, Shechem violates Dinah
Covenant proposed by gentiles	26-31, Abimelech proposes a covenant of peace	8-12, Hamor proposes marriage

The chapter offers three important lessons.

Victory can lead to complacency.—Jacob's history reaches its high point with his surrender to the Lord in Genesis 32 and his reconciliation with Esau in Genesis 33. After these spiritual victories, "Jacob came in peace to the city of Shechem" (33:18, Hebrew). Such peace after spiritual turmoil is a great blessing, but it can tempt us to let down our guard against subsequent temptations. Jacob is inexcusably passive in dealing with his children in Genesis 34, leading to tragic consequences. We who stand must constantly take heed lest we fall (1 Cor 10:12), watching soberly and vigilantly against the adversary's attacks (1 Pet 5:8).

Spirituality cannot be inherited.—The theme of deception in connection with marriage on the part of the patriarchal line is a counterpoint to Jacob's spiritual growth.

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- Abraham lied about Sarah twice (ch. 12, 20), and accepted her maidservant as a concubine (ch. 16).
- His spiritual climax in ch. 22 appears to mark the end of such strayings, but does not keep Isaac from lying about Rebekah (ch. 26), imitating Abraham's first failing.
- Isaac's own relation to the Lord is sealed in 26:25, but does not keep Jacob from many indiscretions. Jacob's are worse than those of Abraham and Isaac because they are within the family, rather than directed toward outsiders. In particular, in accepting the maidservants as wives, he imitates Abraham's second failing.
- Jacob reaches his spiritual climax with the encounter at Mahanaim in ch. 32, and his own conduct seems appropriate now, but his sons He has grown beyond such sin, but his sons have not.

The general principle is clear: spirituality is not an inherited trait, but a matter of growth for each generation.

Beware the entanglements of the world.—First Dinah, then her brothers (at least) fall victim to the seduction of the world that believers should be one people with unbelievers. Like Lot, having encamped “before the city” (33:18, cf. 13:12), the family soon falls under its sinful influence.

Inciting Incident

1, Dinah and the Daughters of the Land

Dinah the daughter of Leah.—Though Jacob probably had more than one daughter (37:35), only one was listed in the birth history, and that because of this episode. We are reminded that she is Leah's daughter, because this relation is what motivates Simeon and Levi (her full brothers) in revenging her dishonor.

the daughters of the land.—The title appears only one other place, in 27:46, where Rebekah expresses her fear that Jacob would take such a girl for a wife. Avoiding the influence of such women was the justification for sending him back to Padan-Aram for a bride. These are hardly fit company for a young lady of the chosen people. Remember the exhortation of 1 Cor 15:13, “evil communications corrupt good manners.”

Dinah ... went out to see the daughters of the land.—Both verbs suggest defective behavior on Dinah's part.

- “to see” recalls the origin of Eve's sin in 3:6. Curiosity into the ways of the world is likely to draw us into those ways.
 - Proverbs warns against drunkenness by saying, “Look not on the wine when it is red,” 23:31
 - Job protests his purity by saying, “I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?” 31:1
 - This seems to be the point of our Lord's warning in Matt 6:22, “the light of the body is the eye.” The eye guides the body in its actions, and anticipates those actions. If the eye is directed toward evil things, the body will soon be led into evil practices. “Be careful, little eyes, what you see.”

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- “went out” shows her leaving the protection of her father’s encampment. It may have overtones of illicit behavior:
 - Leah “went out” to allure Jacob, 30:16;
 - The Law of Hammurabi (1800 BC) condemns a woman who “wishes to go out from” her husband’s house (law 141).
 - The targums translate “cult prostitute” as “one who goes out in the countryside.”

More generally, note from Num 30 that a woman (other than a widow or a divorcee) is always defined with relation either to her husband or her father. Dinah’s desire for independence as a single girl is a danger sign, and she in fact falls into difficulty because of it.

2-3, Shechem and Dinah

The “daughters of the land” apparently introduced Dinah to the “sons of the land.” One of them took a fancy to Dinah. He was the son of a local prince, probably spoiled and accustomed to getting whatever he wanted without question. Note from 20:2 and 26:10 that unattended women were considered to be fair game in this culture.

Defiled.—This rendering of the Hebrew verb (*anah* is extremely unusual, and it is worthwhile to consider why the AV translators use it.

The verb means “afflict” or “humble,” and is translated that way in 61 of its 84 occurrences in the OT. It is the standard verb for “rape,” and in such contexts is translated “force” (Judg 20:5 and 4x in the Tamar incident in 2 Sam 13). Nowhere else is it translated “defile,” or by any other word semantically equivalent to “defile” (e.g., “pollute,” “make unclean”). What could have led the translators to select this rendering?

The proper Hebrew word for “defile” *does* occur in this chapter, in verses 5, 13, and 27, to describe what Shechem does to Dinah. These are the only occurrences of the root in Genesis. If we consider the root elsewhere, we might well wonder what it means here.

- It is overwhelmingly a cultic root. More than half of its occurrences are in Leviticus. Nearly 12% of the verses in Leviticus use the root. It describes someone who is excluded from worship because of some ceremonial irregularity.
- If we focus attention on the Piel verb (which is used in Gen 34), the object is usually a sanctuary, rendering it unfit for worship: Num 19:13, 20 (tabernacle); 2 Kings 23:10, 13 (Tophet); Psa 79:1; Ezek 5:11; 23:38 (the temple). This aligns well with the Levitical concern with the concept; those who are defiled cannot participate in worship. They are excluded from the sacred commonwealth (compare Eph 2:12).
- In the narrowest cultic sense, any woman who lies with a man is defiled for the remainder of that day, Lev 15:18. But this usage differs from Genesis:
 - In Lev, the man as well as the woman is defiled (cf. Lev 18:20); in Genesis, only Dinah.
 - In Lev, normal marital intimacy has this effect; in Genesis, the point is the illicit relation.

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- In Lev, the concern is with participation in the tabernacle worship; there is no such cultus yet in Genesis.

The AV translators recognize that it is unusual to use “defile” to refer to illicit intimacy. By translating the verb “to humble” in the same way, they are drawing our attention to this unusual correspondence. “If you really want to understand the significance of the rape in v.2,” they say, “you must notice that this chapter emphasizes that it constitutes defilement.”

The closest parallel to Genesis is Ezekiel, who regularly uses the term to describe illicit sexual relations, such as adultery (18:6, 11, 15; 33:26) or incest (22:11). Like Genesis, Ezekiel uses the term unilaterally, for illicit relations (not intimacy in marriage), and asymmetrically (the woman is defiled, but not the man). (*Ezekiel also extends the term to the land (36:18) and God's name (43:8).*)

This explains the choice of *translation* in v.2, but pushes the question back to the *author*. Why does Moses use the term in this chapter in a way so apparently different from his usage in Leviticus? Suggestion:

- Cultic defilement makes a sanctuary or a person unfit for the worship of God.
- The imagery of God as Israel's husband is pervasive in the OT: Isa 54:5; Jer 3:14; Hos 2:19 (though much later than Moses).
- The law that God will give in Deut 22 and 24 makes it clear that promiscuity makes a woman unfit for her husband.

Summary: we must not let the world lure us into thinking that impurity is a minor matter. Our popular culture insists that fornication is inconsequential, and even desirable in making a person a more experienced spouse. Moses' use of “defile” directly contradicts this view. Fornication makes a woman unfit for her husband. While the man is not said to be defiled, Gen 34 and Ezekiel make it clear that he actually is condemned more harshly for having done this to the woman.

His soul clave.—Shechem's peremptory violation of Dinah is to be condemned; at the same time, he did not then cast her off, but cherished a deep affection for her, and wanted to make the matter right by marrying her.

Compare the rape of Tamar by Amnon the son of David in 2 Sam 13:11-14, after which Amnon “hated” her (v.15). Both princes are spoiled, self-centered, and fleshly, but Shechem at least cherishes a sense of ongoing affection.

4-24, Marriage Negotiations

The negotiations are described in three stages.

- First, Moses gives us a vignette of each of the parties involved in the negotiation: Shechem, Jacob, Hamor, and Jacob's sons.
- Then he describes the discussion in which they are involved,
- And finally the arrangements that Hamor makes with his fellow citizens to satisfy the requirements of Jacob's sons.

4-7, Introducing the Participants

Note the chiasmic arrangement, with the sons on the outside and the fathers in the middle.

The structure of these four sentences is peculiar. One would expect each to begin with the name of the person being described, but in fact only 5 and 7 begin this way. 4 and 6 begin with narrative verbs. Thus the backbone of the narrative is “Shechem asked his father to negotiate a wedding, and his father went to Jacob, and said” 5 and 7 are parenthetical. But this seems overly subtle to communicate in exposition.

The characters in the matter of Dinah indicate the important role that parents have in balancing their childrens’ immaturity. Shechem loves Dinah, which is commendable, but demands her from his father as a spoiled child, accustomed to getting whatever he wants. Hamor is suave and sophisticated, able to wrap his son’s desires in diplomatic language. The sons of Jacob, though motivated by a godly jealousy for their sister, are rash and impetuous. Jacob should have moderated and guided their zeal as Hamor did Shechem’s. Instead, his passivity leads to disaster. Parents need to be willing to share in their children’s struggles, and children need to value the perspective and experience that their parents offer.

4, Shechem and Hamor

Shechem does not make a polite request, but demands, “get me this girl-child.” His demand is phrased like that of Samson in Jud 14:3, who is clearly resisting his parents’ wishes. 1 Kings 17:10,11 shows what the construction would be for a polite request. This vignette highlights Shechem as **spoiled**, accustomed to getting whatever he wants.

5, Jacob

Jacob learns of the event, but takes no action, ostensibly because he wants to confer with his sons, Dinah’s brothers. This in itself is not unreasonable; cf. the role of Laban the brother of Rebekah in the negotiations for her marriage in ch. 24. Jacob is cautious, which is commendable, unless it leads to **passivity** and indecision, as in Jacob’s case. One would expect him to be angry, as David was at the rape of Tamar (2 Sam 13:21, “But when king David heard of all these things, he was very wroth”). We are left with the impression that Jacob doesn’t care that much for Dinah. (Maybe he is resisting the dominance that so characterized his father-in-law Laban.)

6, Hamor

Hamor’s character contrasts with that of both Shechem and Jacob. Unlike Shechem, he undertakes a reasonable negotiation with Jacob. Unlike Jacob, he is not passive, but takes action to rectify the situation. Yet we will see from his later words that he is not entirely truthful. He is **suave and sophisticated**.

7, Jacob’s Sons

Just as Hamor contrasts with Shechem, Jacob’s sons contrast with him. When the news reaches them, they return to the encampment, filled with **grief and wrath**.

- “Grieved” expresses “the most intense form of human emotion, a mixture of rage and bitter anguish” (Wenham on Gen 6:6). Unlike Jacob, they are deeply upset with what has happened.

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- “Wroth” indicates their attitude toward Shechem. They are not disposed to be at peace with him and his people.

There follow two phrases that characterize Shechem’s action, explaining why the men are so upset.

He had wrought folly in Israel.—This expression occurs in the following instances:

Reference	Who	Deed	Consequence
Deut 22:21	Damsel	Bride who is not a virgin	Death: Stone with stones
Josh 7:15	Achan	Stealing the dedicated things from Jericho	Death: Stone and burn
Judg 20:6, 10	Men of Benjamin	Rape of the Levite’s concubine	Death (20:13)
2 Sam 13:12	Amnon	Rape of Tamar	Death (via Absalom)
Jer 29:23	False prophets: Ahab ben-Kolaiah, Zedekiah ben-Maaseiah	Committed adultery with their neighbours’ wives, spoke lying words in the Lord’s name	Death: Nebuchadnezzar will roast them with fire.

In all but one case, the phrase describes sexual impropriety, and in every case, it is punishable by death. We have a hint here of the direction that the sons are planning to take. (Note, however, that according to the later law in Deut 22:28,29, rape of a girl who is not engaged is *not* a capital offense, but simply requires marriage, which is the solution that Shechem is proposing.)

which thing ought not to be done.—The expression is used 3x, always in reference to impropriety in the domain of marriage: here, Gen 29:26 of the need to marry Leah before Rachel; 2 Sam 13:12 of the rape of Tamar. *Calvin’s view that it refers to the wrath of the sons is thus not likely.*

The character of the sons is thus as **rash and impetuous** as Jacob is passive. They are full of youthful ardor, without the balancing wisdom of age; he is old and too tired to impart his wisdom to his sons.

8-19, Hamor and Jacob’s Sons

Of the four parties introduced in 4-7, only three participate in this discussion. Jacob is entirely silent. He has left the matter to his sons, thus abrogating his responsibility as head of the household.

Proposal

First Hamor speaks, then Shechem.

Hamor makes three proposals of increasingly general scope.

- v.8, let Shechem marry Dinah. This is all that Shechem wanted, and would be an honorable response to the event that has occurred, except that it dilutes the distinctness of the chosen people.
- v.9, more generally, our tribes ought to intermarry. You’ve been living off in your tents, separate from the community, but Dinah’s initiative in trying to bridge the gap is a good

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thing. From the fleshly perspective, this seems the wise thing to do, but it would completely negate what the Lord has been doing in separating a people unto himself. This kind of relation is explicitly forbidden in Deut 7:3.

- v.10, become full members of our society, with the rights of property and free trade.

Hamor’s proposals seem friendly and innocuous. But they are unacceptable from two perspectives.

1. They compromise the separateness of the chosen people. In every age, God’s people are called to be distinct from the unbelievers around them, and marriage is the primary manifestation of this separateness. Hamor may not be expected to appreciate this, but Jacob and his sons should (note first two examples in the table below).

Person	Separateness	Manifestation in Marriage
Abraham	Gen 12:1, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house”	Gen 24:3-4, “thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: 4 But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac.”
Isaac	Gen 26 (tension in the city; blessing alone)	Gen 27:46-28:1-2 “Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. 2 Arise, go to Padanaram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother’s father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother’s brother.”
Nation	Deut 7:1-6 “thou art an holy [separate] people”	Deut 7:3,4
Believers	Rom 12:2 “be not conformed to this world” James 1:27 “keep himself unspotted from the world” James 4:4 “the friendship of the world is enmity with God” 1 John 2:15 “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” 2 Cor 6:14-17	1 Cor 7:39 “she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.” 2 Cor 6:14

2. Hamor should recognize that he is glossing over the offense, which is twofold. Not only has Shechem raped Dinah, but she is detained in his house (as we will learn in v.26). He is negotiating from a position of unfair strength: “If you want to see your daughter again, you’d better join with us.” His attitude rather seems to be, “I am a great prince; you should be honored at the opportunity to join with my august house.

Shechem (v. 11) then repeats only the first request, “give me the damsel to wife” (cf. v.8). He offers to pay whatever “dowry and gift” they request. The dowry would be given to the bride as her security in case of widowhood or divorce, while the “gift” is apparently for Jacob and his sons. Shechem also shows no sign of remorse, but thinks that his wealth is all that is needed to set things right. In the event, he has no idea just how high the bride price will be (27-29)!

Counterproposal

The counterproposal by Jacob's sons can be understood on three levels.

1. The words themselves are theologically *correct*, and at first glance might reflect a desire to expand the knowledge of the true God.
2. However, the words are not *complete*. They are superficial, presenting only the outward sign and saying nothing of the underlying covenant that is the whole point of the outward sign.
3. Furthermore, their words are not *sincere*. Their motive is wrong.

Their error is one that tempts us today. Spirituality is more than saying the right words. It is an attitude of heart toward the Lord. Too often we are tempted to deal with people on the basis of their formulaic acceptance of biblical doctrine, when what is really at issue is the state of their heart. God is not a lawyer. What matters is not getting people to pray a certain prayer, but recognizing when God has changed them internally.

14-17, Their Superficial Correctness

Superficially, their correctness is seen in their objection to the marriage and the requirement they pose. But the offer they make shows their carnality..

Note their motive, their objection, their requirement, and their offer.

14, Objection.—They refuse to marry Dinah to an uncircumcised man. They recognize that they are a distinct people, marked by circumcision, and that it is wrong for them to marry across this line.

15, Requirement.—They pose to the Shechemites the same requirement that God laid on Abraham in 17:10. This is fine as far as it goes, but they say nothing about the fact that this circumcision is the mark of a covenant that God has made with them. If the Shechemites really want to enter into this covenant, they must put away their false gods and worship the Lord alone. Compare the instructions for subduing other nations in Deut 20:10,11: the pagan nation is to be tributary to Israel, not a peer with it, and certainly not to absorb it. The sons of Jacob do nothing to challenge the underlying paganism of Shechem.

16, Offer.—Under this condition they agree to intermarry, live together, and in fact become “one people.” The expression only occurs 4x in the OT: 2x in this chapter, once in 11:6 where it recalls what the Lord objected to at the tower of Babel, and Esther 3:8 where it describes Israel's uniqueness in the face of the other nations. Hamor did not use this term in his proposal, but his proposal was very much along the same lines as the idea at Babel, and the sons of Jacob are playing on the natural man's desire for earthly unity, and he readily picks up the phrase in v.22. This was not God's purpose for his people. Exod 19:5,6 reminds us that they are to be a peculiar people, a holy [separate] nation.

17, We will take our daughter, and be gone.—This threat would have been costly to carry out, since it would require them to abandon land that Jacob had purchased in the area. It would also have been difficult, since Dinah is at this point in Shechem's house.

13, Their True Motive

From the start, they were “deceitful,” and motivated by a desire for revenge for the violence done to Dinah. They had no real desire to bring the Shechemites to worship the one true God. This deceptive motive completely compromises the theological correctness of their perspective.

Jacob’s Role

Jacob is not mentioned explicitly in the negotiations. But he must acquiesce in the offer for Hamor to act on it. He is to be faulted: either he is not party to their deception, or he is not and then he is wrong for agreeing to “become one people” with the Canaanites.

Acceptance

Jacob’s sons may have hoped that their steep condition would be rejected, giving them grounds for violence. But Shechem’s infatuation with Dinah is so great that he concurs.

Hamor and Shechem do not perceive the deception.

he was more honourable.—We might better translate, “more honored.” The point is not that he was more honest or more trustworthy, but that he had status in the community. This is why he bore the name of the eponymous founder of the city, and sets the stage for the acceptance of his proposal by his fellow-citizens in the next paragraph.

20-24, Hamor and the Men of the City

unto the gate of their city.—As usual, the open space within the gateway was the customary place for the elders of the city to gather and for city business to be transacted.

Hamor and Shechem present their case skillfully, beginning with innocuous requests and building up to the more onerous condition. But they are deceitful, in two ways.

- They offer their townspeople the prospect of assimilating the wealth of the nomadic tribe camped on their border. Contrast 21a with 10. They do not mention the prospect that Jacob’s family may grow rich.
- They present the proposal as though motivated purely by good citizenship, and say nothing of their true motive for the request, to satisfy Shechem’s personal desire for Dinah.

Note in 22 that they pick up on the sons’ notion of becoming “one people.” Such union is always attractive to those of the world, and in v.24, the men of Shechem consent.

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25-29, Execution

The sons wait until the debilitation of the Shechemites has peaked, then attack in two stages.

First, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s full brothers, attack the city and slay all the males. “Boldly” really means “securely” and probably describes the city, which was undefended because it trusted in the covenant that Jacob’s sons had proposed. Their cruelty is all the more reprehensible because they are violating a trust.

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Then the other brothers (“the sons of Jacob”) spoil the city. This is the “bride price” they demand in exchange for their sister’s humiliation. Shechem did not realize just how much he was offering in v.12!

Was their action right or wrong? Later episodes in the Bible resemble this one, and are approved by God.

- In later years, the descendants of Jacob will return and slaughter the Canaanites, largely because of their sexual perversity. Lev 20:23 “And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things [sexual aberrations in the previous verses], and therefore I abhorred them.”
- In Num 25:17f, God commands Israel to smite Midian because of their corrupting influence. This is carried out in Num 31:1-9 in terms that closely echo Gen 34. Compare in particular Num 31:9 “And the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods.” with Gen 34:29 “And all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives took they captive, and spoiled even all that was in the house.”
- But there is an important difference. It is not yet God’s time. They were to wait to the fourth generation, “for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen 15:16).

There is a more general lesson here. “Man looks on the outward appearance; the Lord looks on the heart” 1 Sam 16:7.

- People tend to want to classify actions as good or bad absolutely.
- In this case, an action (the annihilation of a city) is not in itself good or bad. What matters is its alignment with God’s purposes.

30-31, Explanation

Jacob rebukes his sons for their precipitous action. He has two fears:

- “Ye have troubled me to make me to stink”: His reputation will be put at risk. He says nothing about the Lord’s reputation.
- “I shall be destroyed.” His faith is not in the Lord, who delivered him from Esau, and can just as well deliver him from the inhabitants of the land.

Jacob’s response is “a day late and a dime short.”

- He is late. He should have taken a more active role with his sons in resolving the problem in the first place.
- He is short. The larger issues are not his own security, but their abuse of the holy rite of circumcision, the honor of their word, the question of whether they should have agreed to marriage with Shechem at all. These he leaves to the side.

Their response is short and to the point.

- “Our sister,” not “your daughter,” reminds us of the latent divisions within the family. “They wrest her out of the father’s guardianship” (Sternberg, in Wenham). If Jacob will not protect her as a father should, they will do their duty as brothers.

- The “harlot” language refers perhaps to the offer of money to make right the violation. How could we go ahead and accept money to right such a wrong?

Technical Notes

Coordinated wydbbr ... wy'mr (34:14)

Gen 19:14, identifying those to whom Lot speaks. This could be a close parallel to 34:14, if we understand the relative clause as an adverbial accusative, “and they spoke to the one who had violated their sister, and they said, “

This is the only instance of *wydbbr)\$r* in the OT.