

## Genesis 34

### Limits of the Text

In Genesis 34 Moses recounted the rape of Dinah and the revenge of her brothers, Simeon and Levi. There is a strong thematic connection to the second half of the previous narrative: Although Jacob was careful to keep his family separated from Esau's family, he was not careful to keep his family separated from the pagan Canaanites who lived in Shechem. The narrative of Genesis 34 actually begins at the end of the previous chapter (33:18-20), which serves as a transition from conflict with Esau to conflict with the Shechemites.

### Interpretation

33:18 And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram, and he camped before the city.<sup>1</sup>

Jacob made a vow to return to Bethel (28:20-22), and God commanded him to go there (31:13); but Jacob stopped in Shechem. Stopping in Shechem was only partial obedience on Jacob's part. On the positive side he was in Canaan now, unlike Succoth which was east of the Jordan, and he did build an altar to worship God (33:20). On the negative side, however, he was not at Bethel. This was the Jacob who on the one hand let God fight his battle with Esau but on the other did not obey God completely. "We have in Jacob faith mixed with partial obedience."<sup>2</sup> But in the end, partial obedience is merely a euphemism for disobedience; and this disobedience cost Jacob and his family dearly.

Arriving safely (or peacefully) in Canaan was a condition in Jacob's vow to the Lord at Bethel. If God would bring him back to his father's house in peace, then the LORD would be his God (28:21). Despite serious threats from Laban and Esau, God had indeed been faithful and brought Jacob back to Canaan in peace. The terrible irony is that God brought Jacob back to Canaan in peace, but stopping in Shechem turned out to be a stop in a place of violence.<sup>3</sup>

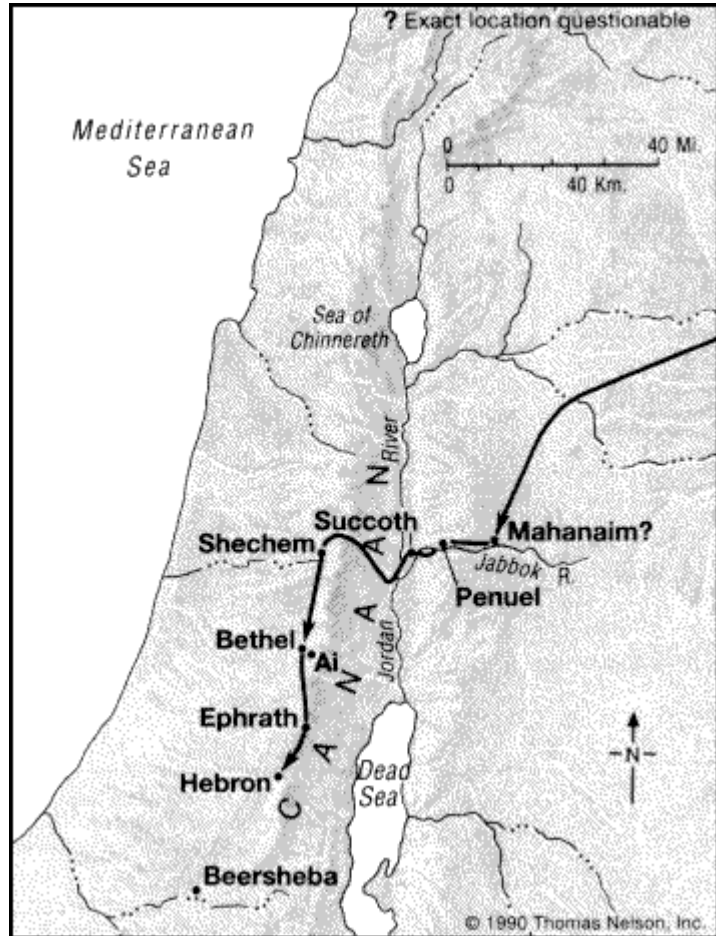
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<sup>1</sup> All quotes from ESV unless specified otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes, 407.

<sup>3</sup> Mathews, 574.

Shechem was located about 35 to 40 miles north of Jerusalem and about 20 miles north of Bethel, approximately a day's journey. Today it is an archeological dig known as Tell Balatah, and it's located about one mile east of Nablus.<sup>4</sup>



Why did Jacob stop at Shechem? Shechem was at the crossroads of trade,<sup>6</sup> a good place to do business. Jacob spent several years in Succoth tending to his livestock (33:17), and it appears that he stopped in Shechem in order to make some money from them.

[33:19 And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for a hundred pieces of money the piece of land on which he had pitched his tent.](#)

Why did he buy land here? Moses does not indicate why he bought land, but it's a good guess that Jacob purchased the land for a burial plot. Abraham had done

<sup>4</sup> Google "tell balatah" for more information on the dig and its history.

<sup>5</sup> Nelson's.

<sup>6</sup> Kidner, 172.

something similar (23)—and Moses often pointed out the similarities between characters in his book—and the bones of Joseph would later be buried here (Jos 24:32).

But whatever the reason for buying the land, Jacob set up his tent here, he stayed for a while. He began to do business and interact with the people of Shechem. Moses' words here are no accident; they were designed to remind us of another character who had acted similarly. "Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom" (Ge 13:12). Jacob was well on his way to becoming the next Lot.

[33:20 There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.](#)

Abram had stopped near here (12:6) and build an altar when God appeared to him (12:7), and Jacob did the same. Jacob had promised God that if God brought him back to Bethel, then "the LORD shall be my God" (28:21), and here he fulfilled (at least in part) his vow and made God his God. El-Elohe-Israel literally means "God is the God of Israel."

Was this a true act of worship or not? Given that he was in Shechem, not Bethel, was this genuine piety or a cover-up of his sin? Commentators are mixed in their response. Ross takes a very positive stance and writes, "Jacob affirmed through worship that the God who appeared to him at Bethel and at Peniel was indeed his strong deliver. The new man, Israel, thus declared his faith in the strong God by naming the altar."<sup>7</sup> Kidner, however, takes a more negative stance and writes that buying the land "was disobedience none the less, and his pious act of rearing an altar and claiming his new name of Israel...could not disguise the fact."<sup>8</sup> The act does appear to be a genuine act of worship; Moses did not give any editorial remarks to the contrary. But it was, nevertheless, worship in the midst of compromise and disobedience. "The idle years near the Canaanite city reflect a general spiritual passivity on Jacob's part."<sup>9</sup>

Moses used these three verses (33:18-20) as a transition between the encounter with Esau to the encounter with the Shechemites. Having followed Jacob from Succoth to Shechem, the stage is now set for the terrible consequences of Jacob's disobedience. There are three major movement in this narrative; the first movement is the rape of Dinah.

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<sup>7</sup> Ross, 567.

<sup>8</sup> Kidner, 172.

<sup>9</sup> Waltke, 461.

34:1 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land.

Dinah went out to see the women of the land. The Hebrew verb “to see” (*raah*) can mean to look at, but here it has the sense of to learn or to understand. Dinah did not simply want to see the women of the land, she wanted to get to know them better. She went to meet them (NET) and visit them (NASB95).

Was this sin on Dinah’s part? Before examining Dinah, let’s back up and start with Jacob. He was disobedient in living near Shechem. “In pitching his tent within sight of the Canaanite city, Jacob fails to model for Dinah appropriate distancing from the Canaanites and exposes her to sexual defilement from the notoriously sensual Canaanites.”<sup>10</sup> But even though Jacob was a poor parent in this situation, Dinah was still responsible for her own actions, and there are (at least) three indications that Dinah was not guiltless in her actions. One, she left the protection of her family. “Girls of marriageable age were not permitted to leave the tents of their people to go about visiting without a chaperone,”<sup>11</sup> yet Dinah went out. Mathews understands this verb to mean that she intentionally left the protection of the family settlement,<sup>12</sup> moving about without a proper chaperone. Two, she was intrigued by what should have repulsed. Note the contrast between Dinah and her ancestors. Abraham, her great-grandfather, would not let his servant get a bride for Isaac from the Canaanites (24:3). Rebekah, her grandmother, preferred death to having a Canaanite daughter-in-law (27:46). Isaac, her grandfather, commanded her father, Jacob, not get a wife from the Canaanites (28:1). But Dinah wanted to get to know them better. Three, she changed the nature of her family’s involvement with the people of Shechem, moving the relationship from commercial (33:19) to social.<sup>13</sup> It can be concluded that Dinah’s actions were foolishness at best and outright sin at worst.

Why is Dinah specifically identified as the daughter of Leah? This identification explained why Simeon and Levi reacted so violently; they were full-blooded siblings.

34:2 And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humiliated her.

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<sup>10</sup> Waltke, 459.

<sup>11</sup> Hughes, 412.

<sup>12</sup> Mathews, 590.

<sup>13</sup> Walvoord, 1:83.

This verse provides the tension of the narrative, the conflict that must be resolved.

The ESV fails to capture the brutality of the encounter, saying that Shechem lay with her and humiliated her; the English words that the ESV should have used are aggravated rape or sexual assault. Moses used three Hebrew verbs of increasing brutality<sup>14</sup> to describe Hamor's actions: He physically took her, he had illicit sexual intercourse with her,<sup>15</sup> and he violated her sexually by force.<sup>16</sup> Moses' choice of words makes it clear beyond all doubt that Dinah did not consent to his actions. The HCSB captures the general idea, "He took her and raped her," but the NET translates it perfectly, "He grabbed her, forced himself on her, and sexually assaulted her." This act is also described as defilement (34:5) and an outrageous (disgraceful) thing (34:7).

How old was Dinah at this time? She was born after Leah's six sons (30:21), and she was perhaps six or seven when Jacob left Laban (31:41). Jacob spent some years in Succoth and Shechem, though Moses didn't record exactly how many. She must have been old enough to be sexually mature and attractive. She was referred to as a young girl who was of marriageable age (34:4). Waltke estimates her to be around fifteen years old.<sup>17</sup>

The name Hamor means donkey, which was not necessarily a pejorative term, as donkeys were valuable animals.<sup>18</sup> He was the ruler of this area, a word reflecting the fact that Shechem was probably not quite a city just yet. "At the time of Jacob, the walls were probably just beginning to be built."<sup>19</sup> His standing among his people would have been an encouragement for the sons of Jacob to intermarry (34:9) and the men of city to agree to circumcision (34:24).

[34:3 And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her.](#)

When Amnon raped Tamar, he "hated her with very great hatred, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had

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<sup>14</sup> Waltke, 462.

<sup>15</sup> Swanson, DBLH 8886.

<sup>16</sup> Swanson, DBLH 6700.

<sup>17</sup> Waltke, 459.

<sup>18</sup> Mathews, 592-3.

<sup>19</sup> Waltke, 462.

loved her" (2 Sam 13:15), but Shechem was just the opposite. The three verbs of brutality in 34:3 are replaced by three vivid verbs of affection. He wanted to be with her, he was attracted to her,<sup>20</sup> and he spoke to her heart (which might mean he tried to comfort and reassure her, or it might mean that he spoke romantically to her, appealing to her emotions and/or passions<sup>21</sup>).

How are his actions in this verse to be understood? Is Shechem a good guy or a bad guy? In fact, this same question could be asked of Dinah, Hamor, Jacob, the sons of Jacob, and the men of Shechem, all of whom have some good actions and some bad. There is no simple answer to this question. "That no person comes across as purely good or wholly wicked is because the author treats the characters as they really were. They are not one-dimensional figures, cardboard images, but flesh-and-blood persons whose moral conduct fluctuates."<sup>22</sup> On the one hand, Shechem wanted to continue the relationship with her, which was good. On the other, it was a relationship built only upon his lustful passions and his determination to keep satisfying them.<sup>23</sup> And in contrast to Jacob's actions in the previous chapter, "he makes no apology or attempt to indemnify the family he has wronged."<sup>24</sup>

34:4 So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this girl for my wife."

Shechem continued to be a mix of good and bad. On the one hand he was demanding and disrespectful to his father; on the other hand he proposed a proper marriage, which implied at least some willingness to be committed. It should be noted that at this point Shechem was holding Dinah hostage in his home (34:26), thus could negotiate from a position of strength.

The act of a father seeking a bride for his son was a common practice (Abraham found a wife for Isaac, 24:1-3; Judah for Er, 38:6) and allowed in the Mosaic Law (Ex 21:9; Dt 22:16).

The second movement of the text is the deceptive negotiations between the Shechemites and the sons of Jacob; both parties operated with sinful motives.

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<sup>20</sup> Swanson, DBLH 170.

<sup>21</sup> Brown, 525.

<sup>22</sup> Mathews, 579.

<sup>23</sup> Mathews, 593.

<sup>24</sup> Waltke, 462.

34:5 Now Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah. But his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came.

Shechem had defiled Dinah; he made her morally unclean. This was the language of cultic impurity from the Mosaic Law (Lev 18:19-23).

Despite this defilement, Jacob held his peace. This is the most perplexing part of the story. “The expected response would be anger or rage,”<sup>25</sup> so why did Jacob keep quiet until his sons came in from the field? A quick survey of commentators reveals answers that are all over the map. The NET Bible implies that Jacob was either indifferent or confused.<sup>26</sup> Hughes says Jacob was apathetic because Dinah was Leah’s daughter,<sup>27</sup> implying that if this had been a daughter of Rachel, he would have acted. Ross says that Jacob was indecisive, uncertain what to do.<sup>28</sup> Mathews suggests that since Jacob had failed to protect Dinah and failed to react in anger, he lost the respect of his sons and was forced to stand by helplessly as his sons took command of the situation.<sup>29</sup> Sailhammer lays all the blame on the sons, castigating them for their deception and praising Jacob for his admonishment of them at the story’s end.<sup>30</sup> There’s a really good reason why there is such a variety of answers: The reason for Jacob’s passivity simply isn’t known. Although Jacob’s lack of outrage and lack of leadership in the situation are evident, Moses didn’t give any explanations as to why. Whatever the reasons, they are clearly not important for understanding the narrative.

34:6 And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him.  
34:7 The sons of Jacob had come in from the field as soon as they heard of it, and the men were indignant and very angry, because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob’s daughter, for such a thing must not be done.

Hamor went to speak with Jacob, as father to father, but Jacob’s sons quickly took over the negotiations from their passive father.

Whereas Jacob was quiet, the sons were indignant and very angry; this was the expected response. The root idea of “were indignant” is to be filled with grief,<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The NET Bible, Gen 34:5.

<sup>26</sup> The NET Bible, Gen 34:5.

<sup>27</sup> Hughes, 413.

<sup>28</sup> Ross, 573.

<sup>29</sup> Mathews, 597.

<sup>30</sup> Sailhammer, 215.

<sup>31</sup> So NASB95, HCSB, NKJV, NIV.

but this verb can also have the idea of one's response to being filled with grief. This narrative is all about the brother's response, thus the ESV translates it as "were indignant" and the NET as "were offended." The same form of this verb is used in 6:6 to describe God's reaction to the wickedness of mankind: "The Lord regretted that he had made humankind on the earth, and he was highly offended" (NET).

The Hebrew word for "be angry" is related to an Aramaic word that means "to cause fire to burn," thus it is sometimes translated as kindled. "When the Lord heard it, His anger was kindled" (Nu 11:1, NASB95). Like the kindling that starts a fire, this word can emphasize the cause of anger,<sup>32</sup> but like fire that burns, it can also focus upon the actions to follow.<sup>33</sup> Probably both nuances are in view here. Jacob's sons became angry because Shechem had done such an outrageous thing, a disgraceful, wicked thing that was clearly in defiance of God's moral standards,<sup>34</sup> and their anger led them to murder the men of Shechem and plunder the town.

There are two additional interesting points in this verse. The first is that this is the first time Israel is named as a nation.<sup>35</sup> There was clearly a sense of community; what was done to a daughter was done to all. The second is that Moses added an editorial comment. Lest anyone doubt where he stood, he let the children of Israel know that such a thing must not be done. Why would it be so important for Moses to add this point? It was important because when Moses wrote the Torah, the children of Israel were on the brink of re-entering the Promised Land. If such actions were sinful in Jacob's day, they were still sinful in Moses' day. If the Canaanites lived in such a manner in Jacob's day, they still lived in such a manner in Moses' day. The people of faith were not to commend or imitate these actions in Jacob's day, and they were not to commend or imitate them in Moses' day. Moses' words would later be echoed by Tamar when Amnon tried to cover up his rape (2 Sa 13:12).

34:8 But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him to be his wife.

Seeing a passive father, Hamor began to bargain with the not-so-passive sons. Notably absent from his negotiations is any mention of the rape, an apology for

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<sup>32</sup> Harris, 322.

<sup>33</sup> Swanson, DBLH 3013.

<sup>34</sup> Swanson, DBLH 5576.

<sup>35</sup> Walvoord, 1:83.

it, or the current position of Dinah as a hostage. Hamor thought that if a reasonable and generous solution to the problem could be found, then the sins committed would not be that big a deal;<sup>36</sup> this was not how the people of God were supposed to think.

**34:9 Make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves.**

Hamor held out two benefits to the sons of Jacob if they would accept the marriage proposal. The first benefit was intermarriage. This was a chance to acquire their own wives (after all, where exactly were the sons of Jacob supposed to get their brides from?), and with the wives would come alliances and thus military protection. Intermarriage was exactly what Abraham and Isaac had dreaded<sup>37</sup> and what the Mosaic Law would later forbid, because it inevitably turned the Israelites to idolatry. "The incident foreshadows the temptations Israel would eventually face when they entered the promised land (see Deut 7:3; Josh 23:12)."<sup>38</sup> Of course the premier example of the end result of intermarriage was Solomon (1 Ki 11:1-6). "The patriarchal fear of such contact with foreigners was not xenophobia but a justified bulwark against corrupting religious influences."<sup>39</sup>

**34:10 You shall dwell with us, and the land shall be open to you. Dwell and trade in it, and get property in it."**

The second benefit was land. Hamor offered Jacob's sons the land, and with the land would come increased economic prosperity through trade and travel.

The irony of this verse is nearly overwhelming. This was the Promised Land, the land God had promised to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but now Hamor the Canaanite, father of a rapist, was offering it to them. Like Abraham with Hagar, here was an opportunity to shortcut God's plan and do things their own way. Forget the rape, give their sister away, take a few wives, and they could have it all! Of course this lure had a hook in (as sin always does; Ja 1:14-15); Hamor had every intention of taking and no intention of giving (34:23).

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<sup>36</sup> Hughes, 413.

<sup>37</sup> Waltke, 464.

<sup>38</sup> The NET Bible, Gen 34:9.

<sup>39</sup> Mathews, 600.

34:11 Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give.

34:12 Ask me for as great a bride price and gift as you will, and I will give whatever you say to me. Only give me the young woman to be my wife."

Shechem apparently thought that his father's magnanimous offer would be accepted, because he jumped in to offer any bride price they wanted. The bride price was "the customary marriage transaction paid by the bridegroom to the parents."<sup>40</sup> Shechem's offer was generous because the bride price was normally a set amount, and he was offering an extra gift for the family on top of the bride price.<sup>41</sup>

Here is more irony: Jacob had hoped to find favor (grace) from Esau (33:15), and now Shechem said he was looking to find favor from Jacob and his sons. But where Jacob was humble and sincere, Shechem was merely trying to buy his way out of trouble.

Perhaps Hamor and Shechem expected their generous offers to overwhelm the foreign visitors; if so, they were in for a surprise. Jacob had more than lived up to his name (which meant heel-grabber and deceiver) and his sons had learned their father's ways all too well. They would shortly use Shechem's desperate bargaining against him.

34:13 The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah.

In this verse Moses exposed the thinking of the sons of Jacob (and took a stand against it). What were they thinking? They believed that the end justifies the means. Because Shechem sinned first and sinned wickedly, it was ok to kill him and the entire town, too. This is consequentialism. This is situational ethics. These are the same words that are heard from every child, "But he hit me first." The sons later verbalized their thoughts (34:31).

34:14 They said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us.

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<sup>40</sup> Mathews, 600.

<sup>41</sup> Hughes, 413-4.

The brothers replied that they could do this because it would bring shame and reproach<sup>42</sup> upon the family.

34:15 Only on this condition will we agree with you—that you will become as we are by every male among you being circumcised.

Circumcision was “given as a sign of one’s joining in the hope of God’s promises to Abraham.”<sup>43</sup> They were asking the Shechemites to accept the outward sign without any inward transformation of the heart. But it was probably worse than that, because it seems unlikely they were concerned about converting their enemies to the worship of Yahweh or even about the sinful effects of intermarriage; they were simply out for revenge, and circumcision was a tool to get them there. “Whereas the ritual of circumcision symbolized life and blessing for Abraham’s seed and ultimately the nations (chap. 17), the sons of Jacob employ it for revenge and death against the nation(s).”<sup>44</sup> “Genocide—not evangelism—was the goal.”<sup>45</sup>

The sons are just like the father, scheming and manipulating to fix the situation instead of trusting God and obeying him. What they saw him do to Esau, they did to the town of Shechem. Though in this case they were even worse, because they used the holy as a tool to obtain their goal.

34:16 Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to ourselves, and we will dwell with you and become one people.

34:17 But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter, and we will be gone.”

34:18 Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor’s son Shechem.

34:19 And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob’s daughter. Now he was the most honored of all his father’s house.

The counterproposal was made, and Shechem agreed immediately. The brothers’ offer sound like a win-win situation to them: Shechem could get what he wanted, and Hamor could get what he wanted (34:23). The only thing left to do was convince the rest of the town. Given that Hamor was a prince (34:2) and

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<sup>42</sup> Brown, 358.

<sup>43</sup> Sailhammer, 215.

<sup>44</sup> Mathews, 578.

<sup>45</sup> Hughes, 414.

Shechem was most honored (had a high status in the town<sup>46</sup>), that wouldn't prove very difficult.

34:20 So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying,

In those days the gate was “the center for community discussions, political meetings, and trying of court cases”<sup>47</sup> (23.18; Ru 4:1ff), so they brought the matter before all the men of the town (34:24) and pled their case. They presented three reasons why the communities of Shechem and Jacob should be joined together.

34:21 “These men are at peace with us; let them dwell in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters as wives, and let us give them our daughters.

The first reason to join communities was that the sons of Jacob were at peace with them.

The second reason to join communities was that there was financial profit. They would gain a good trading partner and a wealthy father interested in (more) marriage proposals.

34:22 Only on this condition will the men agree to dwell with us to become one people—when every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised.

34:23 Will not their livestock, their property and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us.”

The third reason to join communities was that they would eventually subsume the house of Israel. Hamor knew that over time everything that belonged to Jacob would belong to Shechem, making them all—especially himself—richer and more powerful. In this verse Hamor revealed his true heart. “Like other political leaders in the world, they make their own lust appear to be in the interest of the community.”<sup>48</sup>

34:24 And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

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<sup>46</sup> Swanson, DBLH 3877.

<sup>47</sup> The NET Bible, Gen 34:20.

<sup>48</sup> Waltke, 466.

The greedy leaders agreed with the plan of their greedy prince (34:2, 23); the hasty leaders followed the example of the hasty most honored one (34:19). These men would soon find that the rope they brought to bind Jacob to them would become a noose about their necks.

Moses repeated the phrase “all who went out of the gate of his city” twice in this verse, which emphasized that every male participated, which left the town utterly defenseless. This, of course, was exactly what the sons of Jacob had in mind. “The ruse of the sons is totally successful.”<sup>49</sup>

The third movement in this text is the murder of Shechem by Simeon and Levi. At this point Moses slowed down and described the final events of the narrative in detail.

34:25 On the third day, when they were sore, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, took their swords and came against the city while it felt secure and killed all the males.

34:26 They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword and took Dinah out of Shechem’s house and went away.

The ESV again demonstrates its mastery of the use of understatement. They weren’t sore; they weren’t in minor discomfort from a torn cuticle or a stubbed toe. They had just been circumcised, and “they were in pain” (NASB95)!

And while they were in pain—according to Jewish tradition the wounds would have been most tender on the third day<sup>50</sup>—Simeon and Levi carried out their brutal plan for revenge. They murdered every male and executed Hamor and Shechem. “Here now is bold biblical realism. The Bible does not spare its readers the awful truth. These two were cold and calculating...The brothers engaged in a genocidal spree...This shocks us. But it was just as shocking to the ancient readers as it is to modern eyes and ears.”<sup>51</sup>

Were the actions of Simeon and Levi just or unjust? Was this not simply the application of *lex talionis*, the taking of an eye for an eye? There are differences of opinion among interpreters. Some have thought it was justified, some have thought it was completely unjustified, and others thought it was justified to some

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<sup>49</sup> Waltke, 466.

<sup>50</sup> Mathews, 607.

<sup>51</sup> Hughes, 415.

degree. However justified a response of some sort might have been, slaughtering and plundering the entire town went way beyond *lex talionis*. “*Lex talionis*...had been trampled by Simeon and Levi. There had been no equity here, only exponential revenge. The brothers’ actions offended every convention.”<sup>52</sup> “The sons’ instinct for justice was correct, but their methods were ruthless and excessive.”<sup>53</sup> In fact, God instituted *lex talionis* in the Mosaic Law to prevent this exact type of brutality. If there is any doubt their actions were wrong, Jacob himself clarified the matter at a later point. When it came time for him to bless his sons, Simeon and Levi were cursed. Jacob used words like anger, willfulness, wrath, and cruelty to describe their actions (49:5-7). Clearly their actions were not completely justified.

Why did they kill all the men of the town and not just Hamor and Shechem? The sense of 34:27 is that the sons considered all of the city guilty of the crime. Ross postulates that since none of the men of Shechem were outraged by the crime or demanded a punishment, but instead considered it a means to their own ends, they were all guilty.<sup>54</sup> But even if they were all guilty, the appropriate penalty was not death.

Why did only Simeon and Levi do the killing? The reason they killed is because they were Dinah’s full brothers; however, they were not her only full brothers. They were sandwiched in between Rueben, the oldest, and Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. Exactly why the others did not participate in the killings is not explained in the text. A sense of Rueben’s kindness was later revealed in protecting his brother Joseph (37:21-22), but no explanation is known for the remaining three.

Moses further exposed the deceitfulness of Hamor and Shechem by revealing in 34:26 that Shechem had been holding Dinah hostage. Mathews suggests the fact “that she remained vulnerable to the prince’s passions may have provoked [the brothers’] charge that Shechem treated Dinah as a ‘prostitute’ (v.31).”<sup>55</sup> Her brothers rescued her and probably returned her to the protection of Jacob’s tents.

[34:27 The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister.](#)

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<sup>52</sup> Hughes, 415.

<sup>53</sup> Ross, 575.

<sup>54</sup> Ross, 574-5.

<sup>55</sup> Mathews, 607.

34:28 They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field.

34:29 All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and plundered.

At this point the other brothers would have learned that the men of the city were dead. At the Hebrew is not perfectly clear here, it appears that the rest of the sons joined Simeon and Levi and returned to plunder the city. Moses again revealed their end-justifies-the-means thinking; they reasoned that Shechem's rape made plundering the town ok.

Note the ironic reversal. The Shechemites planned to take all of Jacob's stuff, but the sons of Jacob took all of their stuff. Indeed the language of these verses repeatedly underscores the fact that they took *all* of the stuff.

34:30 Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. My numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household."

Jacob finally responded, but as Hughes observes, his response was pathetic.<sup>56</sup> He was not concerned about the crime of Shechem, the condition of his daughter, the abuse of the symbol of the covenant, or the "justice" dealt out by his sons. He made no judgment in this text about the rightness or wrongness of their actions. He was not concerned about morals or ethics; in fact, there is no sense of the divine at all in Jacob in this text. It's as if Jacob doesn't know or trust God; it's as if his vow, El-Elohe-Israel, was a sham. The only thing Jacob was concerned about was his reputation and his own skin.

He accused his sons of bringing trouble upon him; the word trouble "reflects the social dimension of an individual's action...[which] has a harmful influence."<sup>57</sup> His reputation in the community was ruined; his plans for financial success were ruined.<sup>58</sup> In fact, they were *so* ruined that he was worried that the deceptive nature of the attack would be considered an offensive behavior (the figurative meaning of stinking like spoiled food<sup>59</sup>) to the nearby clans, who might retaliate and kill his entire clan. His fears were justified (see 35:5), but that's not the point.

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<sup>56</sup> Hughes, 416.

<sup>57</sup> Harris, 666.

<sup>58</sup> Mathews, 590.

<sup>59</sup> Mathews, 609.

The point is that Jacob responded out of his selfishness and his fear of man, not his faith in God.<sup>60</sup>

34:31 But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?"

His sons promptly exposed his hypocrisy. "If Jacob is concerned for his appearance before the neighboring nations, they wonder aloud how he can permit this public disgrace."<sup>61</sup> His sons weren't fooled.

The reader of the narrative is left with an obvious question: Where is God in the narrative? How is he working despite the disobedience of Jacob and his family? His hand doesn't appear to be anywhere in the text. Was God not aware of what was going on? The answers to these questions come from the context of chapter 35, where God again called Jacob to Bethel, and he finally obeyed. Hughes rightly concludes that "God allowed Jacob to experience the appalling weight of his sinfulness so he would return to his call."<sup>62</sup> God certainly never desired for Dinah to be raped or for Simeon and Levi to deceive and murder the town; he wanted Jacob to obey and return to Bethel. But despite their sin, God would use this situation. "Jacob would later go to Bethel humiliated and chastened—God's relentless, tenacious, intrusive grace would have its fearsome, loving way."<sup>63</sup> Sailhammer agrees: "The writer does not wish to suggest that in such plans God's own plans are represented. On the contrary, Jacob's plans and those of his family are always depicted as the plan of those who are far out ahead of God and his plans. But the ultimate purpose of these narratives is to show that in spite of the fact that such plans run counter to God's own, they cannot thwart the eventual outworking of his intentions."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Waltke, 459.

<sup>61</sup> Mathews, 609.

<sup>62</sup> Hughes, 412.

<sup>63</sup> Hughes, 409.

<sup>64</sup> Sailhammer, 215.

### Three Levels of Narrative<sup>65</sup>

1. Personal History – This is a story about the consequences of Jacob’s sin within his family. When he choose to disobey God and associate with Shechem, his entire family suffered.
2. National History – This is a story about the formation of the nation of Israel. God allowed his chosen nation to experience the consequences of their sins, knowing it would later push them towards the renewal of his covenant with them.
3. Redemptive History – This is a story about the God who is faithful to the promise he made in the garden and his covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Even though the sins of Jacob and his family had consequences, these would not cause God to be unfaithful.

### The Gospel

1. What does this text teach us about ourselves? What need or deficiency in our lives does it expose? As the military says, this is a target-rich environment:
  - a. Like Jacob, we tend to obey God partially. We tend to rationalize our sin and say close enough is good enough. We tend to think that moral separation from the world is not that big of a deal.
  - b. Like Dinah, we tend to be curious about sin instead of repulsed by it.
  - c. Like Shechem, we tend to satisfy ourselves any way necessary.
  - d. Like Jacob, we fail to be outraged at sin, both in our own lives and in our family.
  - e. Like the sons of Jacob, we tend to fix problems ourselves without regard to how God might want us to respond.
  - f. Like Jacob, we tend to be concerned about our reputation instead of God’s reputation.
2. What does this text teach us about God? How does it reveal God’s grace to meet our need? God allows us to sin. He allows us to experience the full consequences of our wrong actions. And he uses those consequences to remind us about and push us towards his grace.
3. How does this text stand in relation to the gospel? This text reflects a key aspect of our need for redemption through the gospel. We need a Savior who will use even the failures of our lives to teach us about his grace.

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<sup>65</sup> See Fee 91 for more information on the three levels of narrative.

## **Textual Outline**

1. Transition: Jacob disobediently stopped at Shechem (33:18-20).
2. Shechem raped Dinah (34:1-4).
3. Hamor and the sons of Jacob bargained deceptively (5-24).
  - a. Hamor offered intermarriage and land (5-10).
  - b. Shechem added a bride price and a gift (11-12).
  - c. The sons of Jacob countered with circumcision (13-17).
  - d. The Shechemites agreed to the counteroffer (18-24).
4. Simeon and Levi murdered the Shechemites (25-31).

## **Central Truth of the Text**

Moses wrote Gen 33:18-34:31 in order to warn the children of Israel about the consequences of failing to be morally separated from the Canaanites.

## **Teaching Outline**

God's desires that his people be holy and set apart unto him, and God wants this church to be morally separated from the culture around us. From this text in Gen 34, we see three consequences of failing to be separated.

1. When we pursue culture instead of Christ, we will compromise in our relationships with the world (33:18-34:4).
2. When we pursue culture instead of Christ, we will compromise in our personal integrity (5-24).
3. When we pursue culture instead of Christ, we will compromise in our solutions to problems (25-31).

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