

Day 31 - TUESDAY: November 22nd

Genesis 34 UCG **Bible Commentary**

Shechem and Dinah, Shechemites slaughtered

The Violation of Dinah

Genesis 34:2 says that Shechem took Dinah and “lay with her, and violated her.” Does this indicate that Shechem raped Dinah or was what happened consensual? Verse 1 says that Dinah “went out to see the daughters of the land.” Some commentators suggest that she was in her late teens and was possibly going to attend some kind of public affair or celebration. It is then suggested that, perhaps because she had no sisters, she was seeking to fit in a little too much with the other girls her age and got herself into a situation she was not ready to handle, losing her virginity not by violence, but by indiscretion.

Still, the vengeful reaction of Dinah’s brothers might imply that Dinah had not wanted this to happen. It is possible that Shechem had plied her with alcohol or wouldn’t back down from any protestations she gave—at which point she didn’t fight. Perhaps it was what we today often call date rape, which is itself a hideous offense. And considering that Dinah appears to have been around 14 or 15 years of age, we would today also call it the crime of statutory rape. Yet that was often considered marriageable age in the ancient Middle East—the society of arranged marriages of that day being often unconcerned with the maturity of those matched together.

Shechem *clearly* did wrong by taking advantage of Dinah and not betrothing her with her father’s consent prior to their physical relations. However, the violation seems non-violent as he spoke kindly to the young woman after the event and even “loved” her (verse 3). (Contrast Shechem’s attitude to Tamar’s rape by Amnon in 2 Samuel 13, where Amnon wanted nothing to do with Tamar after he violated her by force.)

Further, Shechem seemed very willing to meet all the demands of Dinah’s brothers in order to marry her, as painful as the conditions would turn out to be. His men’s willingness to go through the same sacrifice on his behalf could perhaps lend credence to his reconciliatory attitude—though they were also persuaded by the prospect of sharing in the wealth of Jacob’s family, which circumcision would make possible. However, verse 19 does say that Shechem was “more honorable than all the household of his father,” seeming to indicate this was a good-faith attempt to right the wrong he had done. Perhaps the omission of any objection by Dinah could possibly indicate her feelings about what had happened.

Jacob's attitude also seems to indicate that he did not see it as a violent rape, though he surely was not pleased with the situation. He had done business with Shechem's father, Hamor, in the past ([Genesis 33:19](#)) and was certainly disturbed—perhaps even enraged—at what had now happened. However, he was clearly willing to give Dinah as wife according to the agreement his sons offered, as she was found in the city with her new husband after the arrangement was made (verse 26). God later instructed the nation of Israel on how to handle this kind of situation, leaving it in the hands of the father whether the offender could still marry the woman, the offender having to pay a financial penalty regardless of the father's decision ([Exodus 22:16-17](#); [Deuteronomy 22:28-29](#)). So Jacob could have refused to give her as wife if he really felt strongly that this marriage should not have taken place—which he probably would have felt had there been a violent rape. Indeed, God equates the heinousness of rape with that of murder ([Deuteronomy 22:25-27](#)).

Cruel and Unusual Punishment?

Simeon and Levi's violent revenge was not looked upon favorably by their father. He believed that their treachery would give the family a bad name and that their neighbors might unite and destroy his household. It was Esau who was to live by the sword ([Genesis 27:40](#)), not Jacob. The brothers' attack seemed exceedingly brutal, since not only did they kill Shechem, the one who committed the offense, but they slew all the men in Shechem's hometown.

Although Jacob's sons offered justification for their behavior, their father's displeasure was not abated. For even after Jacob's prediction that his family would be wiped out did not come to pass—due to God's protection ([Genesis 35:5](#))—Jacob still showed deep disapproval with Simeon and Levi's actions long afterward. Shortly before his death, Jacob delivered this prophecy from God: "Simeon and Levi are brothers; instruments of cruelty are in their habitation.... Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel" ([Genesis 49:5-7](#)). Here we see that family traits are passed down, probably through a combination of heredity and family upbringing. And in the case of Simeon and Levi, God judged that their descendants would be too volatile to be all together, having their own nations. Indeed, more than likely, this would only spell trouble for the rest of the world. Later, we will see the fiery, emotional demeanor of the family of Levi channeled into a zeal for serving God.