



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Notes

A Crisis in Shechem (1)

Genesis 33.18–34.31

Introduction

1. The continuous story in this text that carries over the chapter break presents us with challenges relative to the meaning of parts of it and how to understand how it fits into the larger Jacob and covenant narratives.

Settlement in Shechem (33.18–20)

2. After a time in Succoth (33.17), Jacob moves to Shechem, about 35 miles west (Willis 1979, 117).
 - a. The city was strategically located at the crossroads of major transportation arteries.
 - b. “‘The city of Shechem’ could mean the city belonging to the man Shechem (the son of Hamor), or a hamlet belonging to the city-state of Shechem” (Willis 1979, 362–363).
3. He buys property from Hamor, Shechem’s father.
 - a. “The monetary unit referred to here (*qesîṭâ*) has not been identified. It occurs elsewhere only in Joshua 24:32 (a reference back to this passage) and Job 42:11. Neither archaeology nor extrabiblical literature provides further information. One possibility is that these pieces are not shaped like coins but take some other form. In Egypt at this time rings of silver (known as *š’at*) were used for exchange. The richest mining zone for silver in the ancient world was in Anatolia” (Walton 2009, 117–118).
4. He also builds his first altar and names it “El-Elohe-Israel,” “God, the God of Israel.”
 - a. Abraham had previously built an altar here (Gen 12.6–7), but that was 200 years before Jacob. In building it, Jacob identifies with the religious practices of his forefathers.
 - b. This is the first example in Scripture of a named altar (cf. Gen 35.7; Exod 17.15; Judg 6.24).

Dinah’s humiliation and defilement (34.1–4)

5. Verses 1–4 prompt us to ask three questions.
 - a. What exactly was involved in Dinah going “out to see the women of the land” (v. 1)?
 - b. What exactly did Shechem do (vv. 2–3)?
 - c. What was the nature of the relationship between Shechem and Dinah (vv. 3–4)?
6. Verse 1: “Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, *went out to see the women of the land.*”
 - a. “The verb ‘to see’ [רָאָה, *rā’āh*], followed by the preposition בְּ (*bet*), here has the idea of ‘look over.’ The young girl wanted to meet these women and see what they were like” (NET Notes 2019).
 - 1) Other translations: NET: “to *meet* the young women of the land.” NIV 2011: “to *visit* the women of the land.”

- b. It's important to remember that Jacob and family apparently remained in Succoth before the move to Shechem for a period of time, probably a few years; and we don't know how long after their move to Shechem that Dinah went to visit the other women.
- 1) This bears on the contextual meaning of "girl" (יַלְדָּה, *yaldāh*; v. 4).
 - 2) *yaldāh* is a word that covers a range of ages.
 - a) Kohlenberger-Mounce (2012, ¶ 7160): "female child, young girl; this can refer to a wide range of ages, from infant to adult."
 - b) HALOT (2000, 412): "1. girl, female child [citing Zech 8.5]; 2. marriageable girl [citing Gen 34.4; Joel 3.3]."
 - 3) While true that "in ancient society, unmarried girls never acquired the right of consent" (Frymer-Kensky in Walton 2009, 118), and married younger than the norm today, we need not infer that Dinah was too young for marriage in that culture.
- c. That she was with other young women suggests the possibility that they were socializing when they/she caught the attention of Shechem.
7. Verse 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."
- a. "Prince" means "leader, ruler, chief, prince" (Kohlenberger and Mounce 2012, ¶ 11,988); also "the sheikh of a tribe" (HALOT 2000, 728). He would have been a man with some power and influence; he also would not have been the first of such men to think he was "entitled."
8. Of course, the issue in the passage is not Shechem's station in life, but what he did; in verse 2, it centers in the word the ESV translates, "humiliated." We begin to get a sense of the challenge for interpreters when we compare different translations of the phrase.
- a. ESV: "... he seized her and lay with her and *humiliated* her."
 - b. NIV 1984 & NKJV: "...he took [lay with-NKJV] her and *violated* her."
 - c. NET: "... forced himself on her, and *sexually assaulted* her."
 - d. NIV 2011 & NASB 2020: "... he took [lay with-NASB] her and *raped* her."
 - e. NRSV & NASB 1995: "... he seized [took-NASB] her and *lay with her by force*."
 - f. ASV & RSV: "... and lay with her, and *humbled* her."
 - g. KJV: "... and lay with her, and *defiled* her."¹
9. "Humiliated" (ESV) translates the verb אָנָה (*anah*).
- a. "[I]n the Piel stem [it] can have various shades of meaning, depending on the context: 'to defile; to mistreat; to violate; to rape; to shame; to afflict' (NET Notes 2019).²
 - b. Also referencing the Piel: "to afflict, oppress, subdue, humble, mistreat" (Kohlenberger and Mounce 2012, ¶ 13,470).
 - c. HALOT gives the general meaning "torment, humiliate," and then notes that in the Piel it means, "to oppress, to subjugate, to attack" (HALOT 2000, 852).
10. But word meaning is not the only factor; context—both historical/cultural and literary—must also be considered. (Compare the word "cool" in American dictionaries and slang.)
- a. John Walton notes that, "in cultures where parent-arranged marriage is the norm, there are always reasons and means to bypass the system. If it is considered unlikely that a marriage will be arranged by the parents, one or both of the parties can take matters into their own hands. For example, if the

¹ KJV and ESV also use the word "defiled" in vv. 5, 13, and 27; but the Hebrew word is different from the word in verse 2, as the ESV notes with the translation "humiliated."

² "Piel" verbs are intensive in Hebrew (cf. Weingreen 1979, 100).

man is seduced or the woman raped, or if the couple engages in intercourse by mutual consent, the question of whether arrangements can be made is largely preempted. Once the girl has been deflowered, the chances of making a suitable arrangement with a different family are significantly reduced. In such a situation, arrangements often follow for the couple to be married, though a premium bride price is usually the consequence. The Old Testament law anticipates such possibilities and gives rulings” (Walton 2001, Genesis 34.1–36.43).

- b. We should note here that *ʿanah* “is not used only for rape situations where the girl is simply a victim, though it does imply that the man takes the initiative” (Walton 2001, Genesis 34.1–36.43).
 - 1) The law later includes regulations to address this situation (as does Near Eastern law), dealing with different circumstances and intensification of action by the man.
 - a) Exodus 22.16–17: “If a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her, he shall give the bride-price for her and make her his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the bride-price for virgins.”
 - b) Deuteronomy 22.28–29: “If a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are found, then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has violated [*ʿanah*] her. He may not divorce her all his days.”
 - c) Deuteronomy 22.24 envisions a case of assault in the city where the girl is also culpable because she does not cry out (and *ʿanah* is again used).
 - d) See 2 Samuel 13.12–14 (Amnon and Tamar), “a rape context where the woman is clearly unwilling” (Walton 2001, Genesis 34.1–36.43); *ʿanah* used in v. 12).
 - c. When we consider the historical-cultural context, we should note that, in an arranged-marriage culture, a family would be dishonored (i.e., shamed) if the girl became involved with a different man than the one with whom the arrangement had been made (or if, as it appears in this case, no arrangement had been made).
 - 1) Walton again cites “Frymer-Kensky” who “further points out that whether Dinah has been raped or virtually ‘eloped,’ the family is shamed by the incident. A rape would be demeaning to Dinah and the family. But if Dinah were in any way involved in the decision, the family would be shamed not only by Shechem’s act, but by Dinah’s lack of respect for the family” (Walton 2009, 118).
11. So, a “rape” or “assault” as we think of it need not be what is envisioned in this text.
- a. Understanding in light of cultural expectations makes some sense of other details in the text.
 - 1) Shechem’s profession of love (v. 4); Hamor’s assurance to Jacob that his son “longed for” Dinah and the attempt to arrange the marriage (v. 8); and Shechem’s offer to pay the bride-price (see Walton’s comment above) (vv. 12, 19).
 - 2) Jacob’s apparent willingness to entertain Hamor’s negotiation (and failure to personally retaliate) and the brothers’ statement that if Shechem would not accept the circumcision terms, they would take Dinah and be gone (v. 17); in other words, there will be no marriage.
 - 3) The fact that Dinah was living in Shechem’s house (though that could mean she had been imprisoned) (v. 27).
 - 4) Even statements that seem to suggest something more intense can be explained in the cultural circumstances.
 - a) That “such a thing must not be done” (v. 7) is understandable in the cultural setting outlined above (though it also makes sense if something more violent had occurred).
 - b) And the later charge by Simeon and Levi that Dinah had been treated as a “prostitute” (v. 31).

- (1) “In the remainder of Genesis 34, the word that the offended brothers use accuses Shechem of making Dinah unclean (NIV ‘defiled’; 34:13, 27). At the end of the chapter, when they seek to explain their violence against the men of Shechem, they accuse the prince of treating their sister like a prostitute. While the analogy to a prostitute potentially suggests that she was not unwilling, the allusion may only indicate that she has been treated like a prostitute because Shechem’s intention was to use and then pay—that is, that she was ‘for hire’” (Walton 2001, Genesis 34.1–36.43).
 - (2) This is sensible in light of Hamor’s promise of wealth to Shechem’s men if they will consent to the terms of alliance given by Simeon and Levi (vv. 20–23).
12. But, not all scholars agree, and much of the above is also explicable if something more violent is in view.
 - a. Thus, for example, Willis concludes: “In spite of certain implications to the contrary, the whole drift of the chapter indicates that Shechem raped Dinah against her will and forced her to live in his house. This is suggested by the verb **humbled** (Heb. ‘*innah*’; vs. 2), ‘defiled’ (*timme*’; vss. 5, 13, 27), and ‘treat as a harlot’ (*khezonah ya’seh*; vs. 31). Verse 2 states that Shechem **seized** or ‘took’ (Heb. *laqach*) Dinah; ...” (Willis 1979, 364).
 13. Whichever interpretation fits, Simeon and Levi overreacted (even in the case of a rape, to kill the entire city and not just Shechem is extreme), creating peril for the family and the future of the covenant/promise. A point to which we will return in part 2.

May 18, 2025

Works Cited

- Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner. 2000. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (HALOT). trans. & ed. M. E. J. Richardson. Koninklijke Brill NV, The Netherlands. Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by OakTree Software, Inc.
- John R. Kohlenberger III and William D. Mounce. 2012. *Kohlenberger/Mounce Concise Hebrew-Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Accordance electronic edition, version 3.4. Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software.
- The NET Bible*, Second Edition Notes (NET Notes). 2019 (1996). Biblical Studies Press. Thomas Nelson. Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by OakTree Software, Inc.
- John H. Walton. 2001. *Genesis*. The NIV Application Commentary. Zondervan. Books epub file, Genesis 34:1–36:43.
- John H. Walton. 2009. “Genesis.” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*. vol. 1. ed. John H. Walton. Zondervan.
- J. Weingreen. 1979 (1959). *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew*. 2nd ed. At the Clarendon Press.
- John T. Willis. 1979. *Genesis*. The Living Word Commentary on the Old Testament. ed. John T. Willis. Sweet Publishing Company.