



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Notes

## A Crisis in Shechem (2)

Genesis 34.1–31

### Review

1. 33.18–20: Jacob’s family settles in Shechem where he buys property from Hamor, Shechem’s father, and builds an altar that he names “El-Elohe-Israel,” “God, the God of Israel.”
2. 34.1–4: Dinah is “humiliated” and “defiled” (ESV wording).
  - a. We noted three questions prompted by verses 1–4.
    - 1) What exactly was involved in Dinah going “out to see the women of the land” (v. 1)?
    - 2) What exactly did Shechem do (vv. 2–3)?
    - 3) What was the nature of the relationship between Shechem and Dinah (vv. 3–4)?
  - b. Verse 1: “to see” has the idea here of “look over” (cf. NET, “meet,” and NIV, “visit”).
    - 1) Dinah is probably a young woman (the contextual meaning of “girl,” *yaldāh*; v. 4); we need not infer from the text that she was too young for marriage.
    - 2) Culturally, unmarried girls never acquired the right of consent; it’s possible she (and the other young women) were socializing when Shechem (“prince,” or “sheik”, v. 2) swept her off her feet, made advances, or forced himself on her (all are possible given what the text says).
    - 3) Given cultural customs, it’s also not impossible that Dinah was complicit in whatever occurred.
  - c. 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.”
    - 1) The different translations of the word ESV translates “humiliated” (*anah*) alert us to different possible meanings and nuances of the word (cf. NIV1984, NKJV; NET; NIV2011, NASB2000; NRSV, NASB1005; ASV, RSV; KJV).
    - 2) The verb in the Piel stem can mean defile, mistreat, violate, rape, shame, afflict, oppress, subdue, humble, subjugate, attack.
    - 3) Culturally, shame could be involved without necessarily involving sexual assault.
  - d. To summarize the quotation we noted from John Walton (2001, Genesis 34.1–36.43):
    - 1) In cultures where marriages were parent-arranged, one or both parties in a liaison could do things to get around and make the arranged marriage impossible to complete.
    - 2) In such situations, whether or not an arrangement had been made/violated, a new arrangement could be made at the cost of a premium bride-price.
    - 3) So, a “rape” or “assault” as we think of it need not be what is envisioned in this text.
  - e. But not all scholars agree, and much of the above is also explicable if something more violent is in view (cf. Willis’s strong statement and evidence adduced for it; 1979, 364).

- f. Whatever the interpretation, 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.

### *Jacob and Sons React (34.5–7)*

3. Some have noted the unexpectedness of Jacob's response as stated in the text: he remained silent and held his peace, leaving it to the sons to express their anger (cf. v. 5, NET Notes 2019, n. 10).
- ESV reads, "held his peace until they came"; NIV: "did nothing about it until they came home." That's a reasonable response and may not reflect indifference or confusion and a failure to act decisively (*contra* NET Notes 2019, n. 10).
  - At the same time, it's evident that he does defer to the sons here instead of taking the lead, a decision that may have led to "disastrous results" (NET Notes 2019, n. 10).
4. They were "indignant" (v. 7; NET – "offended").
- "The Hebrew verb **אָטָו** (*atsav*) can carry one of three semantic nuances depending on the context:
    - To be injured (Ps 56.5; Eccl 10.9; 1 Chron 4.10).
    - To experience emotional pain; to be depressed emotionally; to be worried (2 Sam 19.2; Isa 54.6; Neh 8.10–11).
    - To be embarrassed; insulted, offended (to the point of anger at another or oneself; Gen 6.6; 45.5; 1 Sam 20.3, 34; 1 Kings 1.6; Isa 63.10; Ps 78.40).
  - The third category fits best in 34.7 (NET Notes 2019, n. 14).
5. The brothers stress that "such a thing must not be done."
- This reference to "disgraceful behavior" would certainly be appropriate if a rape or assault had occurred (Willis 1979, 365).
  - But culturally, it would also be appropriate if the family's honor had been attacked.
    - "All ancient cultures considered it important to protect the honor and integrity of the family, the dignity of the individual, and security within society" (Walton 2001, Genesis 34.1–36.43).
      - So, the standard to which they appealed was not limited to their family or Israel.
      - But in arranged-marriage cultures where the consent of a young woman was out of the question, violating the standard practice was also something that must not be done.

### *Hamor and Jacob's Family Negotiate a Marriage Agreement (34.8–17)*

6. Hamor assures Jacob that Shechem loves Dinah and proposes a marriage arrangement that will lead to an alliance between the two peoples.
- Hamor's proposal and its consequences.
    - He offered to pay a premium bride price, no matter what it would be.
    - This would mean that they would come to be regarded as full-fledged citizens of Shechem and no longer sojourners (Willis 1979, 365).
    - The short-term gain would be economically and socially attractive, not to mention offering security to Jacob's family; but their long-term distinct identity (and covenant promise) would be at risk.
  - Jacob's sons attach a significant condition: they will agree only if all the Shechemite males will undergo circumcision.
    - Though not practiced by all peoples, "circumcision was practiced widely in the Near East as a rite of puberty, fertility, or marriage" (Walton 2001, Genesis 34.1–36.43).
  - If they would not agree, there would be no deal; they would take their "daughter" and be gone.
    - The sons' reference to "daughter" is curious, but may be a maintenance of the same general

language they had just used when speaking of the potential marriages (Willis 1979, 366).

*Hamor and Shechem Secure Agreement (34.18–24)*

7. Pleased with the potential agreement and anxious for the marriage to be formalized (Shechem's outlook), Hamor and Shechem present it to the men of Shechem.
  - a. The "gate of their city" (v. 20) was the gate complex that was the location for conducting important public business.
8. The motivations throughout all this are clear.
  - a. Shechem is motivated by infatuation (34.11–12, 19).
  - b. Hamor and the rest of the town are motivated by economic prospects (34.21–23).
  - c. The sons (note that Jacob's motivation is never stated) are motivated by revenge in the name of family honor, a response to the disrespect shown to their family,
  - d. None of them were acting in good faith.
    - 1) Jacob's sons "had no serious interest in the religious scruple. They valued their religious act no more than Shechem did" (Bruggemann 1982, 277).
9. All parties were operating on the premise that the end justifies the means. How did that turn out?

*Simeon and Levi Avenge Dinah (34.25–29)*

10. Showing themselves to be like Jacob, and even more like Laban, Simeon and Levi exact revenge, taking action that was extreme.
  - a. They are the second and third sons born to Leah (Gen 29.33–34), full brothers of Dinah (30.21).
  - b. They caught the city unaware and killed all the males—not just Shechem and Hamor—while they were suffering the effect of their circumcisions.
  - c. Two matters of curiosity are who did the killing and how could they have killed an entire city?
    - 1) Willis notes that Shechem's population was likely small and emphasizes that the men were incapacitated (1979, 366).
    - 2) The context does not demand the involvement of the other brothers (Willis 1979, 367).
    - 3) That Simeon and Levi were the only ones involved is supported in Jacob's later blessings of the brothers which lowers their rank below Judah (the fourth born), specifying this incident as the reason (Gen 45.5–7).

*Israel and the Covenant Imperiled (34.30–31)*

11. Jacob saw the implications of their action and the potential disaster it portended (v. 30).
  - a. Events in chapter 35 indicate his concern was warranted (cf. 35.5).
12. The brothers show no remorse, however.
  - a. The allusion to "prostitute" (which could have implicated Dinah) may be taken as a statement and intended to indicate that Shechem's intention was to use her and then pay, "that is, that she was for hire" (Walton 2001, Genesis 34.1–36.43).

*A Lesson in Providence*

13. An important lesson to learn here has to do with God's providence.
  - a. The picture in this text is beyond unflattering; it's horrific and ugly.
  - b. It also presents a particular problem: how are the family of Jacob and the attendant promise to be kept secure?
  - c. In fact, we have a turning point in the narrative as preparation is made for the Joseph story, the point of which is stated in 50.20: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to

bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

- d. The idea that God works ultimate good for his people is not new, of course. But this event focuses our attention on an aspect of it we often do not consider, as Walton notes in the following:
  - 1) “We often think of providence as a fortunate turn of events, but here, and in subsequent chapters, providence more often than not operates in the context of sinful behavior. If God can only work through godly behavior, there is little he can do in our sinful world. He does not, of course, guide Jacob’s sons to act as they do. His sovereignty in these cases is demonstrated not by overriding the free, wicked choices that people make but by dovetailing those acts of wickedness into his own plan” (Walton 2001, Genesis 34.1–36.43, Bridging Contexts).

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### Works Cited

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- John H. Walton. 2001. *Genesis*. The NIV Application Commentary. Zondervan. Books epub file, Genesis 34:1–36:43.
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