

GENESIS

In the beginning God...

Trouble in Shechem

Jacob and his family apparently spent several years living in the area around Shechem. Based on the events described in this chapter Leah's youngest child, Dinah, must have been at least in her teens, which would mean that her older brothers, especially Rueben, Simeon, and Levi, would have been in their 20's. When they first moved in the area Rueben was probably around 12 years old, which would mean the family must have lived in the Succoth/Shechem area at least 10 years.

Chapter 34

- V1** *Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land.* (ESV)
- V2** *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.* (ESV)
- V3** *And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her.* (ESV)
- V4** *So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this girl for my wife."* (ESV)

Living close to a pagan-worshipping city as his family was, it seems that it would be only matter of time before Jacob's family would be influenced. As his children grew into their teens and then into adulthood, the low moral environment around them would began to have its deadly effect. Living in a polygamous home, with four different 'wives' and mothers, probably made it difficult to maintain consistent spiritual instruction, though no doubt Jacob made a serious and partially successful attempt to teach his children about God's great promises and the unique calling that had been committed to them.

His eleven sons probably had enough fellowship and enjoyment among themselves to occupy their time, but Dinah was the only daughter, at least for some time, and she probably longed for the opportunity to be with other girls her age. Dinah undoubtedly met some of the Shechemite girls and became friends. Being of a different nationality and probably attractive, she could hardly have failed to come to the attention of the Shechemite young men as well.

Dinah soon came to be desired by young Shechem, the son of Hamor, the city's patriarch. Shechem apparently unable to control himself raped Dinah. After he had seduced her, he did not cast her aside, he took her into his own house (See verse 26) and wanted to marry her.

Marriage was not as easily accomplished as a simple sexual adventure, however. In those days, even among pagans, marriage had to be arranged by the parents. Consequently, Shechem asked his father to take the necessary steps with Dinah's father to obtain Dinah as his wife.

- V5** *Jacob heard that Shechem had defiled his daughter Dinah, but since his sons were with his livestock in the field, he remained silent until they returned.* (HCSB)
- V6** *Meanwhile, Shechem's father Hamor came to speak with Jacob.* (HCSB)
- V7** *Jacob's sons returned from the field when they heard about the incident and were deeply grieved and angry. For Shechem had committed an outrage against Israel by raping Jacob's daughter, and such a thing should not be done.* (HCSB)
- V8** *Hamor tried to speak with Jacob and his sons. "My son Shechem is truly in love with your daughter," he said. "Please let him marry her.* (NLT-SE)
- V9** *In fact, let's arrange other marriages, too. You give us your daughters for our sons, and we will give you our daughters for your sons.* (NLT-SE)
- V10** *And you may live among us; the land is open to you! Settle here and trade with us. And feel free to buy property in the area."* (NLT-SE)

Word quickly reached Jacob concerning what had happened to Dinah. Perhaps the news came from her friends or from one of the family servants. Jacob no doubt was grief-stricken and angry, but decided not to do anything without first talking to his sons, who were still out in the field with the livestock. While Jacob was waiting Hamor appeared at his house with the marriage proposal. As this discussion was taking place, Dinah's brothers come running in no doubt they were already aware of what happened to their sister. Dinah had been the only and beloved sister in a large family of boys, and they had all been taught the sacredness of the marriage relation. They all knew of God's purpose to raise up a holy nation through their family, and that the maintenance of integrity and purity was essential to assure God's continued blessing on them. Not only did they resent the affair for Dinah's sake, but because Shechem had "*committed an outrage against Israel,*" disrupting that purity which they had regarded as so vital. Their use of the name of Israel in this connection indicates that they must have had a substantial comprehension and recognition of the deeper value and implications of this event. Their anger probably made Hamor uneasy and trying to ease the tensions in the room he continued urging them to accept his proposition. Except now not only was he proposing that Shechem take Dinah, but now he began to make a much broader suggestion, namely, that there should be general inter-marrying between the people of Israel and those of Shechem. "*Intermarry with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves.*" (Hamor speaking in verse 9, HCSB)

- V11** *Then Shechem himself spoke to Dinah's father and brothers. "Please be kind to me, and let me marry her," he begged. "I will give you whatever you ask.* (NLT-SE)

- V12** *No matter what dowry or gift you demand, I will gladly pay it—just give me the girl as my wife.*” (NLT-SE)
- V13** *The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah.* (ESV)
- V14** *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.* (ESV)
- V15** *Only on this condition will we agree with you—that you will become as we are by every male among you being circumcised.* (ESV)
- V16** *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.* (ESV)
- V17** *But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter, and we will be gone.”* (ESV)

Shechem, who had evidently come with his father but had remained silent up to this point, then eagerly offered to pay Jacob and his sons whatever they would require in the way of a dowry and other gifts. Quite possibly it was this matter-of-fact, businesslike attitude of Hamor and Shechem that infuriated Dinah’s brothers beyond limit. From this point on, the sons of Jacob did all the talking with Hamor. Jacob was apparently so distressed that he left the room altogether, or at least was unable to discuss the subject further. While Hamor and Shechem were talking, the “sons of Jacob” devised a plan of vengeance, which involved blasphemy and murder, as well as deception and cruelty. Such a shocking plan was justified in their own minds because of what they considered to be intolerable sin against their sister and against their name. Not content to take vengeance against Shechem only, they felt that in a sense the whole city was guilty and deserved judgment.

- V18** *Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor’s son Shechem.* (ESV)
- V19** *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.* (ESV)
- V20** *So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying,* (ESV)
- V21** *“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.* (ESV)
- V22** *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.* (ESV)

V23 *But if we do this, all their livestock and possessions will eventually be ours. Come, let's agree to their terms and let them settle here among us."*
(NLT-SE)

V24 *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.* (ESV)

Pretending to go along with Hamor's proposition that there should be general intermarriage between the two peoples, Jacob's sons said the only problem was a 'religious' one. It was their religious conviction that every male in their own nation should be circumcised. If they were indeed to be from that time on to be one people, then the Shechemites also would need to be circumcised. They, without suspecting a thing, readily agreed to this proposition, beginning first of all with Shechem himself, who had no hesitation in submitting himself to the surgical rite, out of love for Dinah. There were other nations, besides the Israelites, who practiced circumcision in early times, so perhaps the terms of this agreement may not have sounded too strange to them.

In the meantime, the Bible is silent concerning the natural question as to what Jacob thought about this arrangement. He would certainly not have approved of the overt plan, that of bringing the two groups together, because he well knew that God had called them to be a separate people. Neither could he have approved the covert plan of Simeon and Levi, because he later rebuked them when he learned what they had done. We therefore must assume that he had participated in none of these conversations. In his grief and uncertainty, he had evidently left the room while Hamor was talking with his sons.

If Jacob was no longer in the room then Rueben, the oldest brother, should have continued the conversation. For whatever the reason, Simeon and Levi took the lead. The two brothers decided that nothing but the death of all the men of the city would atone for such a crime, but the two of them would of course be no match for the much larger number of Shechemites. They probably realized, too, that they could not merely slay Shechem himself, as his fellow townsmen would immediately come after them and probably kill all the Israelites. They could see no other solution but to get the entire city so incapacitated, by having them all submit to circumcision, that they would be unable to defend themselves when attacked.

V25 *Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males.* (NKJV)

V26 *They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went away.* (ESV)

V27 *The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister.* (ESV)

V28 *They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field.* (ESV)

V29 *All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and plundered.* (ESV)

Simeon and Levi must have known that the painful and crippling effects of the surgery were greatest on the third day. On that day, the two brothers proceeded boldly into the city, going from house to house, killing every male in town. When they came to the house of Shechem, they killed him also, and took Dinah out of his house and brought her back home with them.

After the deed was done they took all the women and children captive, possibly making slaves of them, and also took all the animals of the Shechemites plus their other possessions as spoils. In effect, Simeon and Levi had waged a two-man war against the city of Shechem and had come out completely victorious, in their eyes at least.

V30 *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.”* (ESV)

V31 *But they said, “Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?”* (ESV)

When Jacob finally did put in his appearance again, it was merely to complain to Levi and Simeon about what they had done. He had left the matter in their hands, but now was appalled at what they had done. He had tried to live peaceably with the Shechemites, perhaps even hoping that his altar, and testimony that he and his family had shown them, would influence them someday to follow God. But now, whatever testimony his family might have had was gone. Instead of being a witness for truth and love, their name would become associated with deception and cruelty. They had become a “stench” to the other Canaanites in the land, with their moral purity becoming an excuse for murder and pillage rather than an example of God’s holiness and mercy.

Jacob continued on by stating they were vastly outnumbered in the land, and when the news of this massacre circulated among the other Canaanite tribes in the region, it would not be long before they would all converge on Jacob and destroy him and his whole family. Jacob’s complaint was silenced by one question from Simeon and Levi. *“Should he have treated our sister like a whore?”* (ISV) He was complaining about the action they had taken, but what would he have done?

Jacob may not have been able to say anything in reply. He had indeed failed to call on God before the murdering began and now fearing his own destruction he seems to have forgotten God. Perhaps while he was speaking those words he realized the desperate need of revival in his own heart, as well as of a fresh word of guidance from the Lord. Though Scripture does not say so, it seems most likely that Jacob did quickly go to his altar and there cry to God for forgiveness and for instruction. And God, who is gracious and long-suffering, answered him once again.