

“Reading the Women of the Bible “

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(Summarized and quoted by Jay Fullmer)

And important job of a patriarch in the Old Testament was striving to control relationships of the household to the outside world. This story dramatically illustrates the relationship between domestic affairs over household members and the external affairs in their relationship with other groups. The story brings us right into the action:

Genesis 34:1-2

1 And Dinah the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land.

2 And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her.

This may seem very simple and straightforward but let's take a closer look. Dina, who initiates the action, is identified by her position within her family: she is the daughter of Leah and of Jacob. Right from the outset, her identification as the daughter of Leah locate her securely within the family. But at the moment, *her* family is not on Dinah's mind. She is off to see the daughters (girls) of the land. There is no indication that she's looking for trouble or running away. But neither is she performing her duties for her family, perhaps drawing water or shepherding flocks. There is no doubt she has many responsibilities that her family depends on her for. She's acting on her own initiative, reaching beyond the family. "To see the daughters of the land..." That term "the land," is repeated many times in this story. Jacob's people go where the Lord tells them. They do not have a land. The people of "the land" are its inhabitants who may have been there for many generations. They have their own gods and culture. But Dinah wants to connect with them so out she goes. We may have different attitudes today about being independent and exploring the people of "the land," but that can have serious consequences here as we shall see.

The fact that Jacob's daughter is "going out" can have serious consequences. It leaves her family vulnerable. If something bad happens to her, it not only causes her kin sorrow and loss, it also reflects poorly on the patriarch's ability to protect his family. If she does something of which her family or society might not approve, it is a sign that the father or husband cannot control his relatives. The family is dishonored and loses political and economic influence. The honor of the family and its ability to marry off its children advantageously depend on the honor of the father, and he whose daughter has not been chaste is in much the same situation as a man whose wife has committed adultery. Both men lose their honor by being unable to control their family. "Out went Dinah" (as it says in the Heb.) is not an innocent statement. It carries a

warning that something is going to happen. And what happens is a father's nightmare: Dina, who went out to see the girls, is seen by a boy.

The story is commonly called "the rape of Dinah." But the story is not really about Dinah, who never speaks and essentially disappears from the narrative after the third verse. It never tells us clearly that Shechem raped her. The story piles ambiguity upon enigma by "gapping" (leaving unsaid) vital elements. The significance of the story depends on the way readers fill in these gaps. If we assume that she was assaulted, then the story can and has been read and interpreted as a straightforward narrative of rape and revenge, a classic "morality tale," a dramatic illustration of society's desire to keep girls under surveillance. Verse 2 says that Shechem, "saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her." (or *degraded her* – HEB). If we do not assume he raped her, the story becomes a fascinating tale of love, honor, intrigue, and war.

We are not given the information of what leads up to their intimate encounter and we do not know how Dinah feels. Her feelings are not the story's concern; nor are the events that led up to the sex. Even her consent is not the issue, so the story does not make it absolutely clear whether she consented or not.

A later verse makes it most probable that Shechem did not rape Dinah. While describing the anger of Dinah's brothers, the narrator interjects a direct address to the readers, "because he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter; which thing ought not to be done." Such biblical asides are commentaries within the text, sermonic punch lines that underscore the social lessons the author wants to hearers to learn. We found this before in Genesis 2:24, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." The word "therefore" begins the lesson we should learn. Adam's act in the garden is the paradigm of how a man should behave; Shechem's act with Dinah is an example of what men should not do, and the narrator pointed that out. Notice how he uses the term "Israel," (he had wrought folly in Israel) even though the story consistently calls Dinah's father Jacob. The writer then invites the reader to switch from concentrating on Jacob's problem to their own interests as people of Israel. Remember that this account was written long afterward in the days of Moses. The issue here is that any sexual relations outside of marriage with a daughter of Israel is a moral outrage that may not be done. This is why Shechem is described as "defiling" or "degrading" her.

"*Innah*," (translated as defile in the KJV) is a key word in the history of Israel. It usually has nothing to do with sex, and means, to treat people without regard to the proper treatment their status requires.

Readers today may be very concerned that Dinah's consent is not mentioned. But the biblical author views things differently. The story is told from the viewpoint of the family and society

from which Dinah went out. From their perspective, an unmarried girl's consent does not make sex a permissible act.

But the story hastens to assure the reader of Shechem's true feelings by using special phrases with precise technical meanings such as "his soul cleaved" – This relates directly to Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:24), Ruth's feelings for Naomi (Ruth 1:14), Israel for God and God for Israel (Deut. 4:4; Ps. 63:9; Jer. 13:11). Shechem is not fickle. He speaks "kindly unto the damsel" (Gen. 34:3) meaning that he spoke to the heart (HEB. *Dibber 'el libbah*) of Dinah just like Joseph will do to his brothers in Gen. 50:21 and others in a superior social position to those they love (Ruth 2:13; Hos. 2:16; 2 Sam. 19:8; Isa. 40:2). The superior offers loving assurance to his upset, insecure, or alienated partner that he will rectify their status.

The choice of verbs suggests a poignant scene. Dinah is worried and insecure, with good reason. She has broken protocols and realizes, belatedly, what this might entail. Shechem reassures her and asks his father to arrange a marriage. Done right, they should restore the honor of Dinah and her family. But before Dinah or Shechem or Hamor goes to speak to Jacob, Jacob hears that his daughter has been defiled (v. 5). People are talking. The deed has become known, and Jacob has been publicly dishonored. Their offense has escalated into scandal.

Jacob decides to keep quiet until his sons come home. This has puzzled many readers. If Jacob had heard that Dinah had been raped, wouldn't he have been furious? But he has only heard that Shechem has slept with Dinah. Jacob is in a predicament. He must figure out the best way to vindicate himself and restore the honor this deed has destroyed. So, he waits for his sons.

The involvement of Jacob's sons might seem surprising but, if the honor of the family is impugned, the sons will suffer. It will be harder for them to protect their interests if society at large considers them unable to safeguard their domestic territory. Moreover, if the family status falls, they will have a harder time obtaining wives, will have to pay a greater bride-price, and may not be able to marry into high-status families.

Shechem seeks to restore honor by offering a very large bride-price and offering a combined alliance between their families. This will demonstrate the esteem in which the king's family holds Jacob's family, and thus restored Jacob's honor.

But the sons of Jacob are in no mood to accept this peaceful resolution. Secretly they make a deal with Shechem that involves all of the men of Shechem being circumcised before they will give their sister and unite with the people. Shechem and Hamor, his father, agree to this high price not knowing it was a lie. How they got all the men of the town to comply is unclear. Perhaps they persuaded them with the economic benefits of aligning with Jacob's tribe (v. 23). Whatever it was, it worked.

Genesis 34:25-26

25 ¶ And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males.

26 And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out.

If Simeon and Levi had only killed Hamor and Shechem, the townspeople would have been obligated to avenge their death. The brothers' raid must be a full-scale punitive war, in which they take for themselves all the wealth of Shechem, including the children, women and animals (vv. 27-29).

Genesis 34:30

30 And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I *being* few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.

It is easy to see why Jacob reacts the way he does. Throughout his life he preferred to compromise, maneuver, and accommodate rather than initiate confrontation. He has the responsibility to counsel prudence and compromise even while hotheaded young men advocate war. He must tend to both the honor and safety of his family. In the rush to restore the honor that Dinah's actions have endangered, the brothers have brought a new type of dishonor upon themselves. Their violence and their untrustworthy word have made it unlikely that others would wish to risk a treaty with them. The result can be war.

The story of Dinah and Shechem highlights the dilemma of any small group trying to survive. If it is militant, it courts destruction. But if its boundaries are too permeable, it might be loved to death. The distinctiveness of Israel was and is placed at risk every time it comes into close amicable contact with other peoples. But the price of isolation may be eternal enmity and warfare, a price contrary to Israel's own self-understanding as a nation of peace. After the biblical period, the Dinah story continued to be the means by which these discussions took place, and the story was retold often in Hellenistic literature with different variations and permutations.

The questions of boundary protection and boundary definition preoccupy Israel throughout its existence like the family of Jacob, Israel dwells apart. This national dilemma plays itself out on a national scene when kingdoms confront one another in war and peace. But it is also ever present on a personal level, whenever a girl "goes out" to visit the daughters of the land.