

General Comments on Gen. 34 & 38-39

These chapters chronicle some rather interesting events occurring between Abraham's descendants and their neighbors. As such, it sets the context for the subsequent book of Exodus wherein the Israelites are told to take back their lands and expel the current inhabitants. These stories serve to inform us that the current inhabitants of the land are generally a lascivious lot. Lets review some of the highlights of the preceding text and these chapters in specific:

Ham & Canaan (Gen. 9): Ham is presented as harboring incestuous desires and Abr. 1 indicates he spread those practices among his children. His lineage via Canaan are generally assumed to be the present inhabitants of Canaan in the contemporary setting.

Sarai & Rebekah (Gen. 20, 26): Both women are presented as being attractive, and both husbands are presented as in peril of losing their lives because of envy on the part of the local inhabitants. Both women are subsequently put in jeopardy of being violated when among the Philistines, and only Providence spares them.

Sodom & Gomorrah (Gen. 19): Inhabitants indulge in homosexuality and are eager to rape foreigners. They are guilty of crimes of social injustice, of which this homosexual rape is presented as the epitome, and God therefore destroys them. Abraham also wants absolutely nothing to do with them (Gen. 14:21-24).

Wives (Gen. 24, 28): Following the theme of Gen. 6:1, the patriarchs are avoiding "daughters of men" and trying to get "daughters of God" for their sons. Both Isaac and Jacob, through different means, end up with "daughters of God" for wives as the result of the requirements of their fathers. However, Esau takes it upon himself to marry local women and they end up being a real problem to the family (Gen. 26:34-35).

Dinah (Gen. 34): She goes out among the "daughters of man" and ends up in a compromising situation which results in her being raped by Hamor the Hivite. The resulting retribution by Simeon and Levi requires circumcision, which necessarily implies they were previously uncircumcised and therefore is innuendo implying general cultural acceptance of sexual immorality.

Judah, Shua & Tamar (Gen. 38): Judah marries a local Canaanite woman named Shua, even though such things were discouraged by his fathers. Their first two sons turn out to be such that they end up being cursed and killed by God (one of whom it is explicitly stated is killed for failing to uphold the levir's duty, all the while being perfectly willing to bed Tamar anyway). Then Judah ends up bedding Tamar (because he thinks she is a local prostitute) and in subsequently condemning her to death for harlotry, finds out that he is in fact even the more guilty.

Joseph & Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39): Joseph ends up serving in Potiphar's house, where naturally Potiphar's wife is commonly present. Joseph, being a handsome man, becomes the object of her adulterous desire and she repeatedly attempts to seduce him. She becomes extremely aggressive with him, and when rebuffed she takes advantage of the situation to spitefully abuse him for his rejection of her.

This is a sordid set of tales characterizing the local nations as generally lascivious. Whenever the children of Abraham have to deal with them it ends up trouble of the sexual kind. The moral of the stories is: "Don't mix with Gentiles, they'll seduce you". This theme is repeatedly stated in the subsequent books of the Law as the reason why the Canaanites are being expelled from the land and why it is absolutely necessary to utterly remove them. If they don't the Israelites will be seduced by their lascivious ways (cp. Num. 25, Deut. 7). This kind of morality tale is emphasized in such stories as that of Samson and Delilah.

All of this background material sets the stage for later events in the Torah. We see the Lord judging Israel's Gentile neighbors in Gen. 15:16, Lev. 18:25-28, and Deut. 9:3-5. The ultimate condemnation comes in an extermination order, as we see in Exod. 34:11-16, Num. 25:1-3, Deut. 7:1-6, Josh. 23:9-12.

While the general characterization holds up and ultimately form the substance of a national policy, there are a few examples of local Gentiles who are upstanding. Take Melchizedek, Jethro, and Abimilech for example. So, the Torah provides positive examples as well, which mitigate any attempt to substantiate blanket characterizations which could lead to bigotry.

General Comments on Genesis 34

In an effort to make the most sense of the Dinah narrative it is paraphrased below with proof-texts inserted, thus forming an apocryphon. Apocryphons were a common method among ancient

Jews of making the most sense out of obscure Scriptural texts. Typically the apocryphons embellished the accounts by adding material so as to try and explain the obscurities. The apocryphon below keeps as close to the story as possible and adds only what is implied by context. Citations are provided as the story goes, but some of the justifications for the paraphrases is located in the specific comments on the chapter appearing below.

The Dinah Apocryphon

Dinah, daughter of Jacob and Leah, goes out among the neighboring people to mingle with the other women (v. 1). Dinah is an attractive woman who knows she is attractive, and her intent is to check out the competition as well as to check out the local men. In doing so she ends up being abducted by Shechem, the most favored and prominent son (v. 19) of the local ruler, and he rapes her (v. 2). Shechem is enamored with Dinah and tries to persuade her with soft words after this violent act, to no avail (v. 3). Shechem then tells his father to arrange his marriage with her, and Shechem is only too eager to cover up his son's heinous act by cloaking it with the guise of marriage. All the while Dinah is not permitted to leave, but rather is kept at Shechem's house (v. 17, 26) in an effort to prevent the word of her rape from spreading.

Shechem and Hamor waste no time and travel the very same day as the rape occurs to Jacob's house in order to arrange the marriage (v. 6). However, unknown to them Jacob is somehow already aware of Shechem's rape of Dinah (v. 5). When approached by them, Jacob remains silent on both their proposal of marriage as well as the issue of the rape (v. 5). Rather, he chooses to wait until his sons are summoned from the field, and these sons are angry about what has happened to Dinah when they show up (v. 7). After the sons arrive Hamor makes his offer of marriage between Shechem and Dinah, and he attempts to sweeten the proposal by offering them lands which are under his influence (v. 9-10). Naturally, Hamor, like any good politician, omits the matter of Shechem's rape of Dinah from the conversation. Rather, he focuses on how fond he is of Dinah and how the sons can marry the women of his city as well (v. 8). Shechem, being used to getting whatever he wants because he is the son of the local aristocrat, can no longer restrain himself and makes exaggerated offers of fabulous wealth in exchange for Dinah (v. 11-12). While it is in the guise of bride-price, the brothers, knowing he has raped Dinah and is unwilling to admit to it, consider it an odious bribe.

The brothers, displeased not only over the rape but also over Shechem's attempt to cover it up with marriage, are not impressed with his ardor for Dinah and cunningly plan retribution

of the most ironic type (v. 13). They use their tradition of circumcision, one easily verified if questioned, to require they do the same. In the face of such a seemingly daunting requirement, the sons post the ultimatum that Hamor and Shechem and all of their people either do it or they will take back Dinah from them, leaving no room for bargaining (v. 14-17). In doing so, the sons force them to either circumcise themselves or release Dinah and therefore expose the rape. The irony is extreme as if they accept the circumcision, then they are punished in the instrument of rape. Furthermore, Shechem is effectively prevented from violating Dinah again as he would not be able to while healing from the circumcision.

Shechem and Hamor are pleased they have seemingly obtained a means of obtaining Dinah and therefore avoiding the issue of rape (v. 18), so they travel back home thinking all is well. Shechem wastes no time at all in going through with the circumcision, and in doing so he sets the example to the other people of the city (v. 19). The next day Hamor and Shechem then set about convincing the rest of the people in the city that they need to circumcise themselves as well (v. 20-23). Like any good politician, Hamor presents the positives of the union with Jacob's family and omits the negatives. He emphasizes how wealthy Jacob and his family are and how the people will inherit that wealth by intermarrying (v. 23). But, he conveniently omits the fact that they will then have to give up some of their land and grazing rights and so forth which he promised Jacob (v. 10). The people are convinced the deal is in their best interest, so they agree to go through with the circumcision (v. 24).

The following day Simeon and Levi, the two full brothers of Dinah who would naturally be most incensed at her being raped, take advantage of the incapacitation of the males to go in and exact revenge (v. 25). They take their swords to the town and kill all of the males working their way towards Shechem and Hamor's house. When they arrive there they kill both Shechem and Hamor and take back Dinah (v. 26). Afterwards, the other sons of Jacob go and take everything, including the cattle, wives, and children, as the punitive bride-price for Dinah's rape. Simeon and Jacob abstain from the booty to indicate their only interest in the matter was the vindication of Dinah.

Afterwards, Jacob learns what his sons have done and he disapproves of their actions. Jacob fears the locals will combine against them and destroy them as a result of the sack of the city (v. 30). Simeon and Levi demand the principle of protecting the sanctity of one's sister justifies their actions (v. 31). Later, in his final blessing upon his sons, Jacob denounces the action of Simeon and Levi as hot-headed and without his approval (cf. Gen. 49:5-7).

Conclusions

This story recounts an entire course of events that started innocently enough with a young lady out to do some flirting, and ends up a near complete disaster. The only way things could have turned out worse is if Jacobs fears had come to fruition and his neighbors combined against him and wiped out his whole family, which fortunately did not happen. Thus, the story is a warning to the women of Israel, that they ought not to mingle with the local Gentiles, as there will nothing but trouble come out of it. All of this happened simply because she was feeling a bit vain. Had she restrained herself and acted with greater decorum, none of this would have happened. In this manner, it parallels ch. 38 which serves as a warning to the men of Israel.

The story also serves the purpose of showing how a coquettish woman can inspire passion and violence in men. In the case of Shechem, her actions inspired lust and it ended in the violence of rape. In the case of Reuben and Levi, their passion for retribution and self-styled justice ended in the violence of the sacking of the entire city. Thus, the power of women over men to inspire their passions is presented as powerful and potentially disastrous.

Specific Comments on Gen. 34

The story revolves around the verbs "went out" and "taken". It is fashioned in such a way as to end up being a morality play and therefore a warning to the women of Israel.

Dinah "went out" to see the daughters of the land and in doing so puts herself in jeopardy (v. 1)

Dinah is "taken" by Shechem (v. 2)

Hamor "went out" to obtain Dinah for Shechem to satisfy his desire for her and to cover up the rape (v. 6)

Shechem tells Hamor to "take for me" Dinah (v. 4)

Ultimatum given "circumcise or we take back Dinah" (v. 17)

Simeon and Levi "take" their sword to the city (v. 25)

Simeon and Levi "take" back Dinah (v. 26)

The going out and taking are presented as being reactionary to

each other. Dinah's going out and subsequent rape leads to Hamor's going out and trying to cover up the rape. Shechem's taking leads to Jacob's son's taking, and so on. Overall, the intent is to show a set of connected causes and effects that all lead back to the actions of Dinah and Shechem, and indicate how the actions of one or two people can affect many others. Had Dinah not played the flirt and had Shechem not subsequently given into his lust, none of this would have happened.

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. 3 And his soul clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel. 4 And Shechem spake unto his father Hamor, saying, Get me this damsel to wife. 5 And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter: now his sons were with his cattle in the field: and Jacob held his peace until they were come.

v1-5 Dinah, daughter of Jacob, goes out with the local women (v. 1) and is seen by Shechem, the local prince. He captures and rapes her (v. 2). He desires her and attempts to soften the harshness of his actions by ingratiating himself (v. 3). He then tells his father to arrange marriage for them (v. 4). Jacob gets word of Dinah's abduction and rape, but since his sons were all away from the house he waits for them to arrive before doing anything (v. 5).

v1 "went out", the Hebrew term *y-ts-* insinuates coquettish or promiscuous conduct.

"daughters of the land", a non-complimentary title per Gen. 24:3, 37; similar to the phrase "daughters of man" from Gen. 6:1.

v2-3 These two verses are arranged in a parallelism (I dislocated the first person pronouns and isolated them from the verbs to make the pattern more obvious) where the act of physical violence is ironically contrasted with his affectionate behavior afterwards:

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.

[Dinah
the daughter of Jacob]

And his soul clave unto [her], and
he loved the damsel, and
spake kindly unto the damsel.

Had he been genuinely affectionate and loving in the first place he would not have raped her. The affection afterwards seems to be an attempt to justify the rape. It shows how insane the Canaanites had become, with sex, even violent sex, preceding the romance and courtship.

v2 "took her, and lay with her, and defiled her", the Jewish Publication Society translation renders this "took her and lay with her by force" making it unmistakable it was rape and not simply her being taken advantage of in a compromising situation. The Hebrew term in question is "va-ya`anneha", which denotes physical maltreatment and humiliation, cp. Deut. 21:14, Deut. 22:24.

v4 At that time it was customary for the father to arrange the marriages, as was the case with Abraham sending his servant to obtain a wife for Isaac.

"get me", literally "take for me", tying in with the rhetoric of the various "tak[ings]" in the chapter.

v5 "Jacob heard", unfortunately the text does not inform us how Jacob heard the news so quickly. The Hebrew term definitely favors the hearing as being a physical hearing of something audible and not any kind of revelation per se. Since Dinah was out to meet "daughters of the land" perhaps Dinah went out with another lady friend or met or made a friend in Shechem's town, and after Dinah's abduction the friend immediately went to inform Jacob. If this is the case, then perhaps this is why when Simeon and Levi sack the town they leave the women alive and kill only the men, returning the favor the woman, or women, of the town did for Dinah.

"Jacob held his peace until they were come", Shechem and Hamor were in his presence well before the sons arrived, and Jacob felt it best to keep his cool on the matter of the rape and the marriage until his sons show up. It is clear from Hamor's and Shechem's lack of disclosure they do not want to deal with the issue of rape. It is safe to conclude Jacob's silence is used as a tool against them to discern their true motives. So, not only are they not disclosing that Shechem committed the rape, Jacob is not disclosing he already knows of that fact.

Jacob's concern is also obviously about starting a full scale war to the death with this other family (cf. v. 30-31), so

his silence is in part diplomatic as well.

6 And Hamor the father of Shechem went out unto Jacob to commune with him. 7 And the sons of Jacob came out of the field when they heard [it]: and the men were grieved, and they were very wroth, because he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter; which thing ought not to be done. 8 And Hamor communed with them, saying, The soul of my son Shechem longeth for your daughter: I pray you give her him to wife. 9 And make ye marriages with us, [and] give your daughters unto us, and take our daughters unto you. 10 And ye shall dwell with us: and the land shall be before you; dwell and trade ye therein, and get you possessions therein.

11 And Shechem said unto her father and unto her brethren, Let me find grace in your eyes, and what ye shall say unto me I will give. 12 Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me: but give me the damsel to wife.

13 And the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father deceitfully, and said, because he had defiled Dinah their sister: 14 And they said unto them, We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one that is uncircumcised; for that [were] a reproach unto us: 15 But in this will we consent unto you: If ye will be as we [be], that every male of you be circumcised; 16 Then will we give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. 17 But if ye will not hearken unto us, to be circumcised; then will we take our daughter, and we will be gone.

18 And their words pleased Hamor, and Shechem Hamor's son. 19 And the young man deferred not to do the thing, because he had delight in Jacob's daughter:

v6-19b Hamor and Shechem go to see Jacob. Hamor propositions marriage between his son and Jacob's daughter, choosing only to point out the benefits of such an arrangement (v. 6-10). Shechem promises any bride-price demanded and pleads with Jacob for him to permit the marriage (v. 11-12). The sons of Jacob refuses to permit the marriage unless Hamor and Shechem and all their people circumcise themselves (v. 13-17). Shechem and Hamor are so pleased to have been granted the terms for marriage they agree even to circumcision

v7 "when they heard of it", Jacob would surely have summoned them immediately upon hearing of it himself.

v8-12 Following right on the heels of the condemnation of fornication in v. 7, Hamor and Shechem try to cover up the act by failing to confess their sin, deliberately omitting it from their marriage proposal (i.e., Hamor could have taken Jacob aside and confessed that his son has violated his daughter and the right

thing to do was for them to marry), and instead appeal to materialistic means to persuade them.

What it boils down to is Hamor is trying to protect his son's reputation, and his own in the process, as well as avoid any illegalities of the issue. While it is speculative, it seems to me that Shechem is an impetuous, spoiled son of a wealthy, powerful and indulgent father. Shechem is only interested in gratifying his desires, and Hamor is only interested in avoiding the real issue.

v13-14 Since Shechem and Hamor are being completely deceitful over the situation at hand, the sons resort to clever tactics to prevent Dinah from being raped again. They tell them they must be circumcised, which would effectively prevent any further raping. It also clearly serves as punishment to them as they must inflict pain on themselves in the source of the crime. And clearly, they had additional ulterior motives as well as is evidenced in v. 25.

v17 The sons, knowing about the rape, know they can force Shechem and Hamor to accept their terms by proposing this ultimatum. If they reject it, then they will go and take back Dinah from their own house thereby exposing the rape in the full view of the town. Any attempt to prevent the brothers from taking back Dinah would surely cause a ruckus in town.

and he [was] more honourable than all the house of his father. 20 And Hamor and Shechem his son came unto the gate of their city, and communed with the men of their city, saying, 21 These men [are] peaceable with us; therefore let them dwell in the land, and trade therein; for the land, behold, [it is] large enough for them; let us take their daughters to us for wives, and let us give them our daughters. 22 Only herein will the men consent unto us for to dwell with us, to be one people, if every male among us be circumcised, as they [are] circumcised. 23 [Shall] not their cattle and their substance and every beast of theirs [be] ours? only let us consent unto them, and they will dwell with us. 24 And unto Hamor and unto Shechem his son hearkened all that went out of the gate of his city; and every male was circumcised, all that went out of the gate of his city.

v19c-24 Shechem is well respected among his people (v. 19), so he and his father are successful at persuading their people (v. 20-22) to go through with the circumcision (v. 24). The means of persuasion is they tell the people that by doing this they will benefit materially from it (v. 23).

v19c "and he [was] more honourable than all the house of his father", a poor translation in the KJV. A better translation

would be something like "Shechem was the most prominent one in Hamor's house" meaning Shechem was well-respected among his people.

v23 Hamor presents another biased account of the attempted union between the two parties. Here he only mentions that they will obtain Jacob's wealth, he fails to mention they will have to give up some of the local land in order for Jacob to settle there. The land is big enough for everyone, never mind you will have to give up some of yours.

Hamor knows what motivates most people, and plays on that to achieve his own ends. He promises Jacob his people's wealth, and then promises his people they will have Jacob's wealth.

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.

27 The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and spoiled the city, because they had defiled their sister. 28 They took their sheep, and their oxen, and their asses, and that which [was] in the city, and that which [was] in the field, 29 And all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives took they captive, and spoiled even all that [was] in the house.

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. 31 And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?

v25-31 Taking advantage of their self-inflicted injuries, Simeon and Levi attack the city and kill all the men and rescue Dinah (v. 25-26). Then the rest of the sons of Jacob loot the town and take all of the women and children for themselves (v. 27-29). When Jacob learns what they have done he chastises his sons for their brash actions because they jeopardize the safety of all of their family (v. 30). The sons then seek to justify their actions by asking what else they were supposed to do to people who had raped their sister (v. 31).

v25 "on the third day", the whole story has elapsed in a matter of three days. It is safe to assume day 1 contained Dinah's rape and the subsequent appeal to Jacob by Shechem for her hand in marriage. Day 2 would be Shechem's return to town and the convincing of the townspeople to circumcise and follow through. And day 3 would be the sack of the town.

"Simeon and Levi", among the brothers only these two had both the same father and same mother as Dinah, so the implication is their interest in her vindication and release is made all the more keen as a result of closer family ties. However, note throughout the story leading up to this point, it is the brothers in general who are presented as angry about the matter and not just the two of them. The other brothers do care, its just these two are most angry over it and most prone to take action over it.

v27 "because they had defiled their sister", in the case of rape, the one who did it was required to pay the bride price and marry her unless the father rejected the marriage. In which case, the bride price was still required, cf. Exod. 22:16-17.

v31 Simeon and Levi get the last word in this story and it is a rather thought provoking rhetorical question, "Should our sister be treated like a whore?" The intent is to get the reader thinking over the whole matter, weighing out the different character's actions and analyzing them. Was Dinah's behavior appropriate, was she acting like a whore in the first place? What about Simeon and Levi's reactions of sacking the entire village, was their retribution a fair one in that they put all of the males of the town to the sword? The text asks the reader, "What do you think?"

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