

Exegetical Notes – Genesis 34:1-31
“Events at Shechem”

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen, Pastor, Cornerstone Fellowship
101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320
610-384-1375
charleshjensen@aol.com

(Now all three of the basic theological questions Genesis asks have been presented and answered in the text. The first question is, “Whose world is it anyway?” The text answers the question by affirming that it is God’s world by right of creation. It is God’s world because God made it. The second question Genesis asks is “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way?” The answer is by trusting God and obeying Him. The third question Genesis asks is “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way with other people, particularly with the members of our own family?” The answer is we get over the offense and forgive and forget. The rest of the book of Genesis shows us how this process works out.)

Genesis 34:1-31

Verses 1-5

¹ Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. ² When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and raped her. ³ His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. ⁴ And Shechem said to his father Hamor, “Get me this girl as my wife.” ⁵ When Jacob heard that his daughter Dinah had been defiled, his sons were in the fields with his livestock; so he did nothing about it until they came home.

- After coming home and reconciling with his brother Esau, Jacob/Israel settled near the city of Shechem in Canaan (see 33:18-20). The ruler of Shechem was named Hamor, and his son’s name was Shechem.
- Dinah was Jacob/Israel’s only daughter. Her mother was Leah.
- One day Dinah went to the city of Shechem to visit with the women who lived there. During her visit, Shechem, the son of Hamor, saw Dinah. He forced her to have sex with him. She was 14 or 15 years old when this happened.
- After raping her, Shechem decided that he was “in love” with Dinah and wanted her as one of his wives. He told, or commanded, his father to get him what he wanted.

- Jacob/Israel heard that Dinah had been raped by Shechem but did nothing because his sons were out in the fields tending his flocks.

Verses 6-7

⁶ Then Shechem's father Hamor went out to talk with Jacob. ⁷ Meanwhile, Jacob's sons had come in from the fields as soon as they heard what had happened. They were shocked and furious, because Shechem had done an outrageous thing in Israel by sleeping with Jacob's daughter—a thing that should not be done.

- While waiting for his sons to return, Hamor talked to Jacob/Israel about his son's desire to marry Dinah.
- When Jacob/Israel's sons returned to him, they learned what had happened to their sister and were filled with sorrow for her and anger for Shechem because of what he had done to her.

Verses 8-10

⁸ But Hamor said to them, "My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as his wife. ⁹ Intermarry with us; give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. ¹⁰ You can settle among us; the land is open to you. Live in it, trade in it, and acquire property in it."

- Hamor pointed out to Jacob/Israel and his sons that Shechem wanted to marry Dinah. He urged them to allow this marriage because it would be beneficial to everyone.
- If Jacob/Israel accepted this offer, the nation of Israel would lose its special identity as the people of YHWH and become absorbed into the family of Hamor.

Verses 11-12

¹¹ Then Shechem said to Dinah's father and brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and I will give you whatever you ask. ¹² Make the price for the bride and the gift I am to bring as great as you like, and I'll pay whatever you ask me. Only give me the young woman as my wife."

- Shechem then spoke for himself, asking that Jacob/Israel allow the marriage with Dinah. He told them that he would pay any amount to have Dinah as his wife.

Verses 13-17

¹³ Because their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob's sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Hamor. ¹⁴ They said to them, "We can't do such a thing; we can't give our sister to a man who is not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us. ¹⁵ We will enter into an agreement with you on one condition only: that you become like us by circumcising all your males. ¹⁶ Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We'll settle among you and become one people with you. ¹⁷ But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we'll take our sister and go."

- "Jacob's sons replied deceitfully." Jacob/Israel's sons had learned how to act from the example of their father. They were deceitful. They explained that they could not allow the marriage unless all the men of the city of Shechem were circumcised. Only on the condition that all the men of Shechem were circumcised could they allow their sister to marry Shechem, the son of Hamor. So the "bride price" was the circumcision of every man in the city.
- Circumcision is the covenantal mark for Israel (see Genesis 17). It is a sacred sign. Jacob/Israel's sons used what was holy in a deceitful way. This was sacrilegious. It defied the holy purpose of circumcision. It would be like a Christian using the cross or a crucifix in a devious manner, or using the Lord's Supper in some duplicitous way.

Verses 18-24

¹⁸ Their proposal seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem. ¹⁹ The young man, who was the most honored of all his father's family, lost no time in doing what they said, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. ²⁰ So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city to speak to the men of their city. ²¹ "These men are friendly toward us," they said. "Let them live in our land and trade in it; the land has plenty of room for them. We can marry their daughters and they can marry ours. ²² But the men will agree to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised, as they themselves are. ²³ Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us agree to their terms, and they will settle among us."

²⁴ All the men who went out of the city gate agreed with Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male in the city was circumcised.

- Hamor and Shechem convinced the men of the city that the deal with Jacob/Israel would be to their financial advantage. So, the men of the city

agreed to be circumcised, not because of religious conviction but out a desire to gain wealth.

Verse 25-29

²⁵ Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. ²⁶ They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem's house and left. ²⁷ The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled. ²⁸ They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. ²⁹ They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses.

- Three days after they were circumcised the men of the city were still in pain from the surgery. Simeon and Levi entered the city and killed all the men there. They took Dinah home with them. When the other sons of Jacob/Israel heard what their brothers had done, they sacked the city. They took everything they found there as their own, including the women and children.

Verses 30-31

³⁰ Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me obnoxious to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed."

³¹ But they replied, "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?"

- When Jacob/Israel heard what his sons had done, he reproved them for their actions. He told them that what they had done put him and his family in danger from attack by those in the land.
- They replied to their father that his concern was of no matter. They explained that they could not let their sister be treated "like a prostitute." They were obligated to act as they did under the circumstances.

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