

The Family of Abraham - Part 24—The Abduction of Dinah

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Date: 11 April 2019

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] Welcome back to this, the 24th in my series on the story of the family of Abraham. Today we're looking at chapter 34 of the book of Genesis, where Dinah is taken by Shechem, and later on we see Levi and Simeon killing the Shechemites.

This story is a troubling one in many respects, and it's a difficult chapter to understand. Who are the good guys? Who are the bad guys? It's not entirely clear. And as we go through this chapter, I hope I'll be able to shed some light upon those questions.

But there are still many questions that remain. It's not an easy chapter to understand. There are troubling aspects of this chapter. First of all, how Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, is treated, not just by Shechem, but also by her father.

And later on, the actions of Levi and Simeon are also troubling in their own right. So there's the troubling content of this chapter. And in addition to that, we see the chapter itself sticks out a bit. What about this chapter merits its inclusion within the text of Genesis? What does it add to the progression of the themes of the narrative? What about this chapter parallels with other chapters?

[1 : 12] How could we understand this chapter in the light of its surrounding context? Is this chapter just an odd feature that has been dropped into the text? Some source had this and the compiler of Genesis said, well, we have to put this in somewhere.

Where are we going to put it? Well, might as well put it here. Jacob has landed up near Shechem. Here, let's put in the Shechem incident at this point. Later on in the story of Genesis, in chapter 49, when we read the blessings of Jacob and the blessings of his sons, we'll see that this event is referenced in the blessing or the judgment, in that case, upon Simeon and Levi.

In that particular account, I think we'll have some light shed back upon this text. The other thing that we must do when we're reading a difficult text like this is think more broadly in Scripture.

What are some of the parallel texts? What are some of the literary structures that might help us to situate this text relative to other ones? And I think we do have a number of parallel texts.

We also have some thematic unity between this text and the surrounding passages. And that, once again, is very important. If we do not find some sort of thematic connection, we're often left just depending upon our own ill-informed judgment to make sense of what's taking place.

[2 : 34] It helps to have other passages to shed light upon what's occurring within these chapters. So, first of all, the chapter begins with Dinah going out and meeting with some of the daughters of the land.

And this interaction with the daughters of the land may already raise some questions. Is this what Dinah is supposed to be doing? We've seen judgments upon those who intermarry with the Canaanites.

But this sort of fraternization, or we might say sororization, is not something that is explicitly condemned. There seems to be positive relations between Abraham and the people of the land. And later on, Isaac has some positive relations with people of the land, with Abimelech and the covenant that he makes with him. There's difficulties there, but there do seem to be positive relationships too.

So, in principle, this might be fairly innocuous, but it raises some questions. Is she doing something that puts herself in harm's way? Well, one thing that might lead us to believe that is, as we look through the stories of engagement with the people of the land, what we see on a number of occasions is women being abducted.

[3 : 42] We see that in the story of Pharaoh and Sarai, and we also see it in the story of Abimelech and Sarah. Later on, we have the story of Rebekah and Abimelech, and Rebekah is almost taken.

So, there is this theme that we see playing throughout the text of the women often being taken. She's putting herself, perhaps, in a dangerous position. One way or another, that does not justify the actions of Shechem.

In the verses that follow, we see that Shechem, prince of the country, saw her, took her, and lay with her, and violated her. He laid her, and he violated her.

These are very forceful and negative terms. He's not someone who's, what he has done is seen in a very negative light. Now, is this rape that's being referred to?

Not necessarily. I think it's quite likely that what we have here is a case of something more like a seduction. Something where he has gone all against the proper procedure of marriage, and he's taken this woman and humiliated her by not going through the proper protocol.

[4 : 50] And he's made her, put her in a position of someone who's a prostitute later on, we see. Someone who's having sexual relations which may be consensual, but they're outside of any formal structure.

And he's the one that's held responsible for this. Now, later on, in the verse that follows, we see, his soul was strongly attracted to Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman and spoke kindly to the young woman.

The way that he acts in this point does not seem to be of just someone who's seeking to take advantage of her. He really loves her, and he wants to set things right in some way.

He wants to marry her. But his initial actions are shameful. They bring shame upon Dinah. They treat her not as an honourable woman, but as a woman to be taken advantage of.

And although he may have positive feelings towards her, the way that he acts is despicable. And this is something that comes to the ears of Jacob, and Jacob has to deal with the situation.

[6 : 00] Now, within later scripture, we see in Deuteronomy 22, a commandment that talks about the woman who's taken in this sort of position. And it says, in that context, if a man finds a young woman who's a virgin, who is not betrothed, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out, then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman's father 50 shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has humbled her.

He shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days. Now, this is a verse that troubles a lot of people, because people say it means that you're supposed to marry a rapist. That is not what it means.

First of all, when we read the case of the father's position in this, first of all, the father had the veto power on the marriage, so he's not forced to marry his daughter to the rapist.

Likewise, the daughter will, as we see in the story of Rebecca and Isaac's servant and Rebecca, Rebecca gives her consent.

And so there's the expectation that, even in an arranged marriage, that the parties are giving their consent. And in this particular case, what it means is that the young man who seduces a woman, who takes a woman, and without going through all the process, the proper process, without marrying her, without providing security for her, all these sorts of things, if he just lies with her and puts her in a position of being shamed, then he has no right to divorce her.

[7 : 36] He has to, his responsibility is to marry her, go through the proper process, pay a high bride price, and all of this to make up for what he has done to the woman and her family.

What we see in this case, I think, is that sort of situation. It's not the sort of language that we find in the case of Tamar and Amnon.

Where Amnon's actions towards Tamar are far more violent and forceful. That it's not a matter of taking her and lying with her, and having relations with her inappropriately.

He's not violating her forcefully and coercively, but rather there is a violation of protocol, there is a seduction, there is a humiliation of her, in that respect.

Now, it may not be, it may be, I lean towards that reading of it, largely because of the comparisons with other passages where we do have accounts of rape, and they are described in different terminology.

[8 : 44] And the way that Shechem reacts, he seems to love Dinah. And there's not necessarily reason to believe that that doesn't of itself rule out a rape reading, but it raises questions about that.

And the fact that Dinah never seems to be opposed to this union, and that's never raised as an issue. They do care about Dinah's, the brothers care about Dinah's feelings, it seems, but they seem to be prepared to go ahead with the wedding.

There may be other things going on there, as we will see. But we are left to surmise what exactly was taking place. I don't think it was rape. It could have been rape.

I think it was more likely a case of seduction. And what had happened was that he had humiliated her by not treating her in the way that a proper woman to become a wife was to be treated.

And he had dishonoured her family as well by treating her in that way. Jacob, when he hears about the news, responds in a surprising way. He keeps silent.

[9 : 53] And Hamor comes out and speaks with Jacob. And the sons of Jacob come in, and they're incensed. They've heard this news, and they're violently angry about it.

They're vehemently outraged. Whereas Jacob does not seem to be sufficiently outraged. When you read the story of Jacob and think about the way that he relates to Benjamin and Joseph, and how he reacts to Joseph being taken, for instance, and the supposed death of Joseph, the fact that he reacts to Dinah in this way, just by silence, and doesn't seem to have outrage, is strange.

And it seems to betoken his ambivalence towards his children from Leah. At the very beginning of this chapter, it begins by introducing Dinah to us in a way that we already knew.

Dinah is the daughter of Leah. And we knew that already. Why would it repeat it here? And why do we have indications throughout the passage that remind us of the fact that she is Leah's daughter? She is the brother of Simeon and Levi. I think there's a reason for that. And the reason is because there's a breach within the family that Jacob is a father who's showing favoritism.

[11 : 18] He favors Rachel and her children, and he does not seem to care enough for Leah and her children. And this leads to a breach in the family, not just between the two wives, but also between the children of the wives.

And this will play out in chapters that follow. So this is a thematic connection with what we've seen around it. The thematic connection is the favoritism of Jacob and the way that that leads to a breach in the family, a breach in the family that plays out later on in the story of Joseph.

So we're being prepared for that event here. Jacob just does not seem to care enough. The other thing that we can do is we read this story alongside parallels.

It helps us to understand what's taking place. The sons of Jacob come in from the field and they're grieved, very angry, because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, a thing which ought not to be done.

Now, if you look in 2 Samuel chapter 13, you will see something very similar. When Tamar speaks to Amnon, who tries to take her by force, she answers him, No, my brother, do not force me, for no such thing should be done in Israel.

[12 : 29] Do not do this disgraceful thing. This story is very similar. It's a story that has parallels in a number of different respects. David is a Jacob figure, and I've commented upon this in my piece, The Reopened Wounds of Jacob.

I will link to that in the show notes. Jacob is a king-type figure, a ruler within the land, and his sons are having relations with this, or his daughter is having relations with this prince of the city of Shechem.

Now, in the David story, we have one of David's children that gets him complicit in bringing Tamar to him, and the daughter of the king is raped.

And the daughter of the king being raped, the king is angry, but he does nothing. And his failure to act in this situation, because he's complicit, he's unwittingly complicit, and he's complicit in the other way, in that his sin with Bathsheba set these events in motion in many respects.

It leads his other son, Absalom, to enact vengeance against the rapist, Amnon. And in that case, what we see is David being told that all the king's sons have been wiped out.

[13 : 45] Of course, that's not exactly what had taken place. It was just Amnon that had been killed. But this is a very significant parallel. There are contrasts, as we saw, that the actions of Shechem here are not necessarily the same actions as Amnon, where Amnon is forcibly raping an unwilling woman, whereas Shechem, it is quite possible, and I would say likely, that he's having relations with, he's seducing a woman who consents of a kind.

But it's not appropriate. It's not something that treats her honourably. He has to take responsibility for what he has done and set the situation right.

And so what he does is shameful, but he's not the sort of evil character that Amnon is. And later on, it will describe Shechem in a way that presents him in a slightly more favourable light, a light that would be strange were he indeed just a rapist.

He says to his father earlier on, get me this young woman as a wife. And so they're having to do this action to set things right. Hamor is put in a difficult position here.

He has to do dealings with Jacob and try and get Dinah for Shechem and set everything right. And they're trying to set things right after things have already gone wrong.

[15:13] And later on, we'll see that during this time, Dinah is in the house of Shechem. She's in the city of Shechem, which is something that casts a different light upon what's taking place.

The daughter of Jacob has not just had relations with Shechem. She's been abducted by him. And so they want to set up some sort of shotgun marriage and to set things right.

But he is disreputable, reputable in his actions towards her. And something needs to be done to sort out the situation. Hamor speaks with Jacob and his sons.

The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife and make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us and take our daughters to yourselves so that you shall dwell with us and the land shall be before you.

Dwell and trade in it and acquire possessions for yourselves in it. This is something that we've seen on a number of occasions already. The question of how they are to relate to the people of the land and particularly to questions of possession within the land, of inheritance within the land.

[16:22] Can they just receive things as gifts from the Hittites in a way that would make them beholden to the Hittites? How about the king of Sodom? Things like that. And both Abraham and Isaac are very wary of these sorts of entangling alliances about these sorts of situations that make them beholden to the people of the land for their possession.

Rather, they recognize that they are a separate people and they must keep distinct in their marriages. They must keep clear that the land that they get is either purchased completely and outright belongs to them or is something that God gives to them.

One way or another, they cannot receive it as a sort of gift. There is a problem there. And what Hamor is offering here is a sort of assimilation that we can be one people, we can join together.

There can be an intermingling of our two people. And this actually might turn out for good. My son has taken your daughter, but let's see this as a promising situation.

We can maybe make something out of this. And Shechem interrupts at this point. He said to her father and her brothers, he seems to interrupt, he's impetuous, let me find favour in your eyes and whatever you say to me, I will give.

[17:32] Ask me ever so much dowry and gift and I will give according to what you say to me. But give me that young woman as a wife. He's trying to deal with Jacob and his sons at this point.

And he's saying, I will give you whatever mohar you want, whatever dowry, something that gives her security, should I be unfaithful. And also a gift for you, a gift that will be, or maybe a gift for Dinah herself, one way or another.

It's something that is, he's offering something significant here. And the sons of Jacob answer Shechem and Hamor, his father, and speak deceitfully because he had defiled Dinah, their sister.

Jacob does not seem to be acting at this point. Rather, it's his sons. And we've seen that sort of relationship more generally, that the brother interceding on, or arranging marriage arrangements for his sister.

This is something we saw in the story of Laban and Rebecca. It's something that we see in the case of the patriarchs, that present their wives as their sisters, that they can play the role of the brother and intercede on behalf, or act on behalf, in arranging the marriage situation.

[18:44] So they are not obstacles, but they are obstacles in the way that the husband might be, persons to be removed out of the way, but people to be bargained with.

And here we need to remember again, Dinah is in the house and city of Shechem at the moment. She's been taken. So they're with a weaker bargaining position. What are they supposed to do?

And they say, we cannot do this thing to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a reproach to us. But on this condition, we will consent to you. If you will become as we are, if every male of you is circumcised, then we will give our daughters to you and we will take your daughters to us and we will dwell with you and we will become one people.

But if you will not heed us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and be gone. So there is some sort of threat of violence here. They will take their daughter and be gone.

The daughter is in the possession in the house of Shechem at that time. And so if needs be, they will go by force and they will take their daughter from Shechem. But the alternative is get yourself circumcised and then we can intermarry.

[19 : 53] There's little reference here of any clear account of the covenant or any clear account of loyalty to God, of any meaning to this sort of thing. This is the action of pruning that's associated with sexual fidelity, with removing the wildness of sexual behaviour.

And in principle, that's the right thing to do, that if you're going to intermarry, they have to become part of the people of Israel. Rather than you becoming part of them, they should become part of the people of Israel.

And so in principle, this wouldn't be an inappropriate way of dealing with the situation. So there's been this case of inappropriate relations. We can set this right, but you have to commit yourself to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

You have to be circumcised. You have to mark yourself out as one of this distinct group of people. And then under that condition, we can intermarry. But this is something that's offered deceitfully. It's not actually an intended plan. And their words, please Hamor and Shechem his son. They come to the gate of the city and they speak with the men of their city saying, now notice what they say to the men of their city.

[21 : 07] These men are at peace with us. Therefore, let them dwell in the land and trade in it. For indeed, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters to us as wives and let us give them our daughters.

Only on this condition will the men consent to dwell with us, to be one people. If every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised, will not their livestock, their property and every animal of theirs be ours?

Only let us consent to them and they will dwell with us. And all who went out of the gate of his city heeded Hamor and Shechem his son. Every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

What do you notice here? What they say does not mention anything about Dinah, anything about the explicit reasons why they're entering into this agreement. This agreement is purely they present it purely as a political arrangement.

But this political arrangement, although it will allow them to intermarry, they're not saying why they would want that. The specific reason they want it is because Shechem has violated Dinah and he wants to marry her now.

[22 : 09] And so he doesn't give an honest presentation, a forthright presentation of what the reasons are. Other thing to notice is will not their livestock, their property and every animal of theirs be ours?

Only let us consent to them and they will dwell with us. Who is becoming part of whom here? We see that there is a suggestion that they are becoming, the Israelites are becoming part of the people of Shechem, that they are going to dwell with them, that they are going to become one people and that they will become assimilated together.

But it's not clear who's going to become part of who. And we see this also in the livestock, the animals, all their property becoming ours.

Is that really what's going to take place? It's presented as a very favourable arrangement, but they seem to have their own intentions here as well. Once again, remember that they have Dinah in their possession.

This is something where they are holding the cards and so they arrange to go ahead with the circumcision. It's something that maybe serves their purposes, but we should not necessarily believe that they are honourable in this particular action.

[23 : 26] The young man is very, the young man Shechem is very pleased with this arrangement. He wants to marry Jacob's daughter and he's more honourable than all the household of his father.

Now, does this suggest that Shechem and Hamor have different intentions here? Quite possibly that Hamor is thinking the political gain that he can get out of this, where Shechem is driven by his love for Dinah and is not thinking about political advantage that he can gain from this.

One way or another, we don't entirely know. It comes to pass on the third day when they were in pain that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brother, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males.

This is a very serious action that takes place here. It's similar to there's some sort of symmetry here. They take the swords just as Shechem had at the very beginning of the chapter taken Dinah. And then there's another symmetry later on where they, it says, yes, they took Dinah from Shechem's house and went out just as Dinah went out at the beginning of the story.

[24 : 41] So there's a symmetry throughout the story. They killed Hamor and Shechem with his son with the edge of the sword, take Dinah from Shechem's house and go out. The sons of Jacob come upon the slain, plundered the city because their sister had been defiled.

They took their sheep, their oxen, their donkeys, what was in the city and what was in the field and all their wealth, all their little ones and their wives they took captive and they plundered even all that was in the houses.

Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, you have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites and indeed I am few in number. They will gather themselves against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I. But they said, should he treat our sister like a harlot? Again, this is a very troubling story.

The actions that Simeon and Levi take are fairly brutal and cruel. Later on, we'll see similar actions being taken against the Midianites when the Midianites lead the Israelites to unfaithfulness and we see those actions again, Levi involved in that case taking vengeance in the chapters 25 and 31 of the book of Numbers.

[25 : 56] And so there are parallels here and there are ways in which the actions of Simeon and Levi, though brutal, are seen in a not completely unfavourable light. Once again, when we read through these stories, we shouldn't just think in terms of good guys and bad guys.

Often there are complicated characters, characters that are not straightforwardly good or bad. And here we have Levi and Simeon having mixed, having positive motives.

They want their sister to be treated properly and they're outraged by the actions of Shechem and also, I think, probably appalled by the attitude of their father, the favouritism that he's showing or the lack of favour that he's showing towards his daughter.

Shall we allow our sister to be treated like a harlot? Or should he treat our sister like a harlot? Now that's presumably Shechem but, to some extent, it's also Jacob.

Is he allowing this? Is he going to let this just slide? Is he not going to act? Jacob is someone who's fearful in this situation and maybe this casts our mind back to the actions of Abraham and Isaac who both allow their wives to be taken or put their wives at risk because of their fear and the way that they put their wives at risk they try and give themselves a better bargaining position they think about the more expedient way of handling the situation something that would give them greater chance to protect their wives but their wives are put in a dangerous position.

[27 : 30] Here we see that Simeon and Levi act very strongly in that situation in a way that's fairly brutal. Later on we'll see in chapter 49 Simeon and Levi as Jacob speaks about his sons Simeon and Levi are brothers instruments of cruelty are in their habitation let not my soul enter their council let not my honour be united to their assembly for in their anger they slew a man and in their self-will they hamstringed an ox cursed be their anger for it is fierce and their wrath for it is cruel I will divide them in Jacob I will scatter them in Israel what we see there is a reference to their actions that they were violent and cruel and what they did it talks about instruments of cruelty in their habitation now that could be their marriage celebrations it could be instruments of cruelty are their circumcision knives we just aren't clear enough on what that word means it's a hapax legomenon a word that's only used once within scripture and for that reason we're not entirely clear we're looking for similar terms and there have been a number of suggestions they're circumcision knives the knives that are used for circumcision then being used for violence or their wedding feasts that it's a feast or celebration that's used as a means of destroying this other party one way or another it's not entirely clear that referenced them being scattered they will no longer be they won't be gathered together as a single tribe they'll be scattered throughout the land of Israel this story again should be read against the background of chapters 12 20 and 26 with the stories of Pharaoh and Abimelech and the wives of the patriarchs in those cases we see women abducted in order to marry people of the land and then they try and bargain with people in those cases

God intervenes on the first two cases God gives a dream to Abimelech and he brings peace against Pharaoh it would seem that that is the way that they might have to deal with these things they're weaker they don't have a position of strength and Jacob has that same fear as his father and his grandfather that he recognizes his weakness in number although they have a great multitude of flocks and these sorts of things and possessions they are still weak they don't have a position of strength that they would hope for and that gives him a weaker position and so they need to use expediency in the context of Simeon Levi's action explains their plot that they bring circumcision as a means of weakening people and then they can act because they would not be able to meet them full strength head on and in a face-to-face confrontation so once again we're seeing these patterns of unfavored children we're seeing patterns of women abducted by the Canaanites and the people's surrounding peoples this is a sign of the wickedness of the land it's not necessarily this these actions of Hamor and Shechem are not positive things and it's often used not just as a means to take the wives but as a means of assimilating and taking over the people that the people will become assimilated to these other peoples in the land and refusing the wives to these people of the land is a way of keeping the people distinct and upholding the integrity of the covenant Simeon and Levi's actions in contrast to Jacob's expediency and fear are idealistic and violent and they're actions that have deep consequences potential consequences they could lead to Jacob and his family being wiped out but they are absolutely committed to doing this maybe there are some echoes of the story of Laban here going on as well this unwillingness to provide marriage upon certain terms if you go ahead with this then you will be able to be married and then that being a deceitful plot not actually one that was intended to be carried out again maybe they're taking after their grandfather Laban at this point that's quite a possibility other things to notice Hamor Hamor means ass and later on in scripture we'll talk about the ox and the ass being unequally yoked together and this references marriage in some context the ox is Jacob and his family the ass is Hamor and these strangers these foreigners residents aliens within the land these sorts of people I think in this case what we're seeing is a reference to the ox and ass being mixed together and the hamstringing an ox later on that's mentioned is a reference I think back to this what was the ox that was hamstrung by the actions of Simeon and Levi the ox that was hamstrung was Jacob himself he was weakened he was put in a very dangerous position by the actions of his sons and what we see again is when a father fails to take action and to bring justice the sons can bring vengeance and the vengeance they bring is not a positive thing it's not a good thing it's not a legitimate thing in this situation when it goes against the justice meted out by the father we see a similar thing in the story of Amnon and Absalom although vengeance Amnon gets his comeuppance the means of vengeance of Absalom is a wicked thing it's not positive rather David should have acted in this case here Jacob should have acted firmly and his failure to act gave way to vengeance in his sons the hamstringing of the ox I think also connects to the same word a similar sounding word for you have troubled me and I think that's some parallel that's been drawn anyway I think this helps to understand some of the connections some of the parallels some of the thematic resemblances and continual themes throughout this book and this broader cycle I hope it helps Lord willing I'll be back again tomorrow with some questions and answers if you would like to have a question answered please leave them on my Curious Cat account if you'd like to support this and other videos like it please do so using my Patreon or PayPal accounts God bless and thank you for listening for listening video!

[34 : 13] Thank you.