



DINAH

(Genesis 34)

DINAH THE DAUGHTER OF ISRAEL

Many stories in Genesis are tough to read. But it's important to delve into these parts of the Bible, as difficult as they may be. There are ugly sins to confront and hard truths to digest. If we truly want to understand God's character and His plans, we can't skip over the stories that don't have happy endings. What we can do is learn from devastating mistakes and the consequences of purposeful disobedience and sin. The story of Jacob and Leah's daughter, Dinah, is one of those stories—full of horrible, broken people. One heinous decision piled on top of another until there was almost nothing left but a wasteland of violence and destruction, both emotional and physical.

When the story begins, we learn that Jacob and his family were living just outside the city of Shechem, having purchased land there (Genesis 33:18-20). That would appear to be in conflict with the direction God had just given to Jacob to resettle in his native land.

I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land. (Genesis 31:13)

By living outside Shechem, was Jacob already in a place and among a people God had specifically directed him away from? As we'll see in this story, he is a passive father at best. Jacob not only failed to protect and defend his own daughter, but he also floundered in his ability to guide and control his sons.

Jacob's family members were wealthy landowners, something like prosperous Bedouin tribesmen, but they did not live in cities like the highly urbanized inhabitants of Canaan did. We know from archaeological evidence of this period that Canaanite cities were wealthy, well-populated centers of commerce, straddling the Fertile Crescent route between Mesopotamia and Egypt. Canaan was a crossroads of the world, and its various peoples were literate and culturally sophisticated. Their religion was decidedly pagan and polytheistic—a mishmash of gods from the region, including Ishtar and Baal, Chemosh and Bel. The monotheistic outsiders who arrived in their midst, living in camel-skin tents instead of buildings and worshipping an invisible mysterious god, must have appeared awfully strange to the Canaanites. At the same time, Jacob's children would have been fascinated by this new land in which they found themselves, and this strange new people.

It was against this backdrop that Jacob's only known daughter set out.

Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and raped her. (Genesis 34:1-2)

In this horrific situation, a young woman was victimized by a man who apparently had zero regard for her as a person. Dinah

was likely a young teenager when she was brutalized. Jacob and his family were living in a land where they were outsiders, in a culture where young women could be seen as "fair game" by ungodly men. Did Jacob fail in his parental duty to supervise and protect her? It appears she felt no fear in venturing out alone. Did her parents know she had set out by herself?

Any woman who has ever suffered sexual violence can understand the kind of suffering that Dinah went through. For many women, the psychological toll can be even more destructive than the physical one. To undergo the violation of our bodies at the most intimate level tears at the fabric of our being. There can be enormous healing in turning to qualified, compassionate professionals to walk a victim through the trauma. A support network of trusted loved ones can also help a woman weather the flood of emotions, from anger to despair. God Himself promises to bind up our wounds, to be close to the brokenhearted and save those "who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18). The process of recovery and forgiveness can be long and agonizing, but it is possible. Survivors themselves are often the most empathetic advocates, able to turn their tragedy into a path that guides others to wholeness.

Dinah had only known the protection of her family's tents and the respect accorded women in a culture in which all members of the family worked side by side. Any woman's shock at being treated like an object, like a commodity to be abused and then thrown aside, is severe. Dinah's would have been especially so as a country girl, an outsider—perhaps dangerously naive. She had gone from being her mother's treasured youngest child to being treated like a possession by a cruel, entitled man. Oddly enough, in victimizing Dinah, Shechem may actually have taken

her specifically because she would be of value to him. Jacob was a wealthy man, and marriage to his daughter would have been beneficial. Shechem well knew that after he raped Dinah, it would likely be impossible for her family to arrange another honorable marriage for her.

There are many unpleasant things to try to digest in this story, including the passage that follows Dinah's rape.

His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. And Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as my wife." (Genesis 34:3-4)

It seems the better description of Shechem's feelings toward Dinah is that they were fueled by lust, not love. Love does not forcibly violate a young woman. And what are we to make of the revelation that he "spoke tenderly" to her (Genesis 34:3)? Some abusers and rapists will attempt to sweet-talk their victims, whether to cover their own misdeeds or to convince the victim that they in some way consented or provoked the attack. We're told nothing about how Dinah felt or responded, only her rapist's selfish demand that she be made to marry him.

Then her father, Jacob, found out.

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. (Genesis 34:5)

What? Your daughter has been raped, and you're just going to stand idly by until your sons get home? As we'll see a bit later,

Jacob often appeared (as his mother Rebekah did) to be more concerned about the potential impact of events on *him*, rather than on others. What's also missing in this story is any interaction between Jacob and Dinah. She was the daughter of his less-favored wife, Leah, after a long line of sons. What was their relationship like? Was he disconnected from her life and activities? At the moment he learned his daughter had been violated, this verse tells us Jacob "did nothing." Every daughter wants to feel her father is the protector and defender she can count on. Sadly, that's not always the case, and the Bible doesn't hide the flaws of the men and women God is otherwise able to use in His plans—like Jacob.

Shechem's father, Hamor, approached Jacob to talk about what had happened. Hamor was a leader over the region, with authority and power. In those days, sexual conduct was less about consent than it was cultural norms and appearances. It looks like the father of Dinah's rapist thought the best way to handle the crime was to clean it up by negotiating a marriage for his entitled son . . . and then her brothers found out.

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. (Genesis 34:7)

The narrator of Genesis made it clear, more than once, what happened was abominable: "outrageous," "should not be done." Take notice of the phrase "in Israel." For the very first time in the Bible, "Israel" refers not to a man, Jacob, the son of Isaac and Re-

bekah, but to a people. And when a crime had been committed, it had been committed "in Israel," as though this little band of God-fearing outsiders was a mighty and unified people. Dinah's rape created for the first time this sense that they were not just Jacob's family, but also the people of Israel. It was in response to injustice that Abraham's descendants truly became Israel. The danger came when a quest for justice veered into vengeance, as we'll soon see.

Not once does the text record Jacob or any of his sons questioning whether this rape had actually happened, or—more significantly—questioning whether Dinah had consented or not. Dinah had no reason to doubt that she would be avenged, and that the community of her family would have her back 100 percent. Survivors of sexual violence frequently express that one of the most important things that helped them get through their trauma was someone believing their story. Dinah's family did not even need to have the conversation; their belief in her, and in Shechem's guilt, was absolute. They did not sit down to have a debate about whether Dinah should or should not have been going out visiting that day anyway. The Bible does not comment on her behavior in any way at all. That was irrelevant to what happened to her; Shechem raped her. The Bible examines his sin, and he is the one held accountable—ferociously so, by her infuriated brothers.

The immediate reaction from Dinah's brothers was rage, which was a marked contrast to Jacob's seemingly blasé acknowledgment of what had happened. Here's where this story gets so far afield from how our current culture operates that it's hard to fathom. The father of Dinah's rapist began negotiations with Jacob.

But Hamor said to them, "My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as his wife. Intermarry with us; give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. You can settle among us; the land is open to you. Live in it, trade in it, and acquire property in it." (Genesis 34:8-10)

One red flag after another. Not only did Shechem's father want Dinah to marry his son, but the request was also made in a way that suggested there was some love affair going on. Then Jacob was presented with a much broader point of compromise: *let's just start intermarrying!* Jacob, whose twelve sons were the foundations of the tribes of Israel, was presented with the suggestion that he play fast and loose with the covenant God had made directly with his family.

As the conversation continued, Shechem himself spoke up:

Then Shechem said to Dinah's father and brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and I will give you whatever you ask. 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." (Genesis 34:11-12)

Jacob is described here as "Dinah's father." That's notable because one of the key duties of a father in the Ancient Near East was to negotiate marriages for their daughters. But try to imagine the man who had violated your daughter or sister saying, "Let me find favor in your eyes." Was Dinah's value as a young woman so inconsequential to Shechem and his family that they

believed the crime against her could simply be bartered away? Shechem essentially put a price on her head. *Just name your cost, and let me have her.* Shechem becomes an even more repellent figure when you remember that during all this negotiation, while Shechem is smiling and making nice with her family, Dinah is still being held prisoner.

THE FAMILY'S RESPONSE

Whatever Jacob was thinking at this point doesn't seem to matter. His sons had already decided that they didn't owe any shred of honor or integrity to Shechem or his father, Hamor. So Simeon and Levi conned the people of Shechem, and the deal they made would end in death and destruction.

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. We will enter into an agreement with you on one condition only: that you become like us by circumcising all your males. Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We'll settle among you and become one people with you. But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we'll take our sister and go."

(Genesis 34:14-17)

Jacob himself was the original trickster, the wily negotiator and crafty plotter—a man who betrayed his own twin brother, Esau, and father, Isaac. It would make sense that the revenge his sons cooked up was as devious and as clever as their father's. He had taught them well. Note that the brothers, in what I'm sure they believed was justified deception, offered up circumcision as

a part of their scheme. Circumcision was the mark of Abraham's covenant with God, a symbol of the commitment to live as His people. It was a continual physical reminder that God had created a nation out of His unblemished promises. Here Jacob's sons were using something meant to be holy as a negotiating ploy, a means of vengeance—and Shechem and Hamor bought it.

Their proposal seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem. 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. So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city to speak to the men of their city. "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. 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. 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."

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. (Genesis 34:18-24)

What a great deal for the family of the man who'd violated Dinah. It's hard to miss the continued references to Shechem's position as "honored" or "favored." He was basically the equivalent of a prince, and I'd guess princes were used to getting what they wanted. Shechem would not only get to keep Dinah, but

his people stood to benefit financially from this arrangement. Greed was clearly a part of this deal, on many levels. Shechem and Hamor must have been convincing, though, because all of the men of their community agreed to the painful process of circumcision.

Everything I've studied or heard on the issue of circumcision in adult males cites day three after the procedure as the most painful in the recovery process. Would the men have been relying on alcohol or another mind-altering substance to help dull the pain? Whatever the facts on the ground, two of Jacob's sons timed their attack to find the men at their most vulnerable and carry out a merciless slaughter.

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. They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem's house and left. The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled. They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses. (Genesis 34:25-29)

Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, went total scorched earth. They not only killed her rapist and his father, but every man in the city. They plundered everything they could get their hands on. Yes, they took back Dinah, but they also took every other woman and child too. There was a breaking point when Jacob's

sons clearly ran way past justice and into the bloodthirsty rage of all-out vengeance.

You'll often hear reference to the idea of Old Testament justice as "an eye for an eye" and so on. Some have interpreted that to mean you can mete out punishment in the same measure of what's been lost. The Latin words *lex talionis* translate into "law of retaliation." The concept wasn't meant to unleash violence or revenge. It's actually about reining it in or setting a maximum limit of how far someone could go in paying back the one who'd damaged them, not a minimum. It's the idea of letting the punishment fit the crime. Simeon and Levi did no such thing. They left absolutely no room for any measure of mercy.

Our heavenly Father is well versed in the concept of deciding when to grant leniency, whether we humans deserve it or not. In his prayer, the prophet Habakkuk appealed to God on behalf of the people.

LORD, I have heard of your fame;
I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD.
Repeat them in our day,
in our time make them known;
in wrath remember mercy. (Habakkuk 3:2)

Many times, God did choose to redeem His people rather than crush them. The entire New Testament is about His decision to give up His own Son so that sinners who could never be perfect enough would have a grace-filled path to reconciliation with God. One of Jesus's most well-known parables is also one of his most convicting. In Matthew 18, after Peter asked Jesus how many times we must forgive those who sin against us, Christ told

the story of a man who was deep in debt. He was called before a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. At this the servant fell on his knees before him. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything." The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. (Matthew 18:24-27)

One estimate calculates the amount this servant owed as equivalent to nearly \$3.5 billion dollars—with a *b*. There was absolutely zero chance the man could have ever paid it back, just like the debt created by our sins. Yet instead of being overcome with gratitude, what did the man do?

But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. "Pay back what you owe me!" he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay it back." But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. (Matthew 18:28-30)

Hold up. The servant who'd just had a multibillion dollar debt wiped clean then went and took a man who owed him roughly

\$5,800 and had him thrown in prison? Correct, but he wasn't going to get away with it.

When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart. (Matthew 18:31-35)

If that's not convicting, I don't know what is. That parable is such a concrete example to me of how much undeserved mercy and grace I've been given, and the fact that I have zero standing to withhold forgiveness from others. Does God believe in justice? Yes, thank goodness, but He also calls us to factor in mercy. Simeon and Levi did not.

Where was Jacob in all of this? We're looking at the lives of daughters in this book, so what about Dinah and what about her father? How is it that Jacob says nothing in this story until *after* his daughter has been rescued—and in abominable fashion? Rather than recoiling in horror at what his sons had done, Jacob reacted by worrying about how their killing spree was going to impact *him*. Like mother, like son.

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."

But they replied, "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?" (Genesis 34:30-31)

Jacob was likely right that Simeon and Levi had put them all in danger. They were not yet a mighty nation. They wouldn't stand a chance against the combined forces of the Canaanite cities if those potential foes decided to wipe Jacob and his family off the map of the Middle East and out of history forever. But this was a Jacob who was tired of fleeing. He'd had to escape Canaan in fear for his life once before, and he'd fled Syria because his father-in-law, Laban, was hot on his trail. *Just once*, Jacob may have thought, *can I stay in a place without having to run away from it because people are trying to kill me?*

But it was time to go, to the place God had already directed Jacob to settle his family. Following the rape of his daughter and an ungodly massacre by his sons, Jacob was on the move again.

Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau."

So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has

been with me wherever I have gone." So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. (Genesis 35:1-4)

It seems Jacob finally answered the wake-up call. He was willing to go where God directed him, and to truly honor Him. He commanded his family and everyone among their households to get rid of their false gods. How had that practice become acceptable? Jacob knew it was wrong and completely in conflict with God's covenant with Abraham, one that flowed to his descendants. How fitting that all of the idols were buried and left at Shechem.

Jacob would not forget what his sons had done. In his final words to his family, the patriarch made clear there would be consequences.

Then Jacob called for his sons and said: "Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come.

"Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel....

Simeon and Levi are brothers
their swords are weapons of violence.

Let me not enter their council,
let me not join their assembly,
for they have killed men in their anger
and hamstringing oxen as they pleased.

Cursed be their anger, so fierce,
and their fury, so cruel!

I will scatter them in Jacob
and disperse them in Israel." (Genesis 49:1-2, 5-7)

Ouch. In his dying breath, Jacob was still calling out his own sons. *I want no association with these two.* Jacob vowed Simeon and Levi would be scattered and dispersed, unlike the tribes/families of his other sons, who would grow and prosper together.

What eventually became of Simeon and Levi? As Moses was dying and blessing the tribes, he left out Simeon altogether (Deuteronomy 33). Joshua 19 tells us that Simeon's descendants were eventually given land, but it was *inside* the land apportioned to Judah's. Simeon's tribe continued to dwindle and was essentially subsumed into Judah's. Levi's descendants were given no land of their own (Joshua 18:7) and eventually went to Eleazar the priest to ask for somewhere to live. The Israelites eventually agreed to give them various towns where they could take up residence, but they were all throughout the nation—*dispersed*. In Joshua 21:21, we learn one of the cities Levi's descendants are allowed to settle in is Shechem, where this entire tragedy started. The brothers' disproportionate, vigilante justice cost them and their families for generations.

A DAUGHTER'S ULTIMATE PROTECTOR

The Bible does not give us a window into Dinah's inner dialogue or feelings about any of this. Yes, she is central to the story, but it appears the larger points are about several other themes: drifting away from what God had called Jacob to, the evil actions of a man who wasn't in covenant with God, and the deceit and deadly overreaction of men who were. Dinah was a young woman, trau-

matized and caught in the middle of an ugly dispute that turned into a massacre. We see a father who appears disconnected and ambivalent when it comes to his daughter, at moments when she needed him most. Jacob was an imperfect father, yet God honored the covenant He'd made with Abraham and used Jacob despite his inadequacies.

It is human nature to impose on our heavenly Father the experiences we as daughters have with our earthly fathers. We are all lacking, both as parents and children. So, it's important that we constantly refocus our relationship as daughters of God on the unwavering truths of His character. When others abandon, He is ever-present (Proverbs 15:3). When others condemn, He is full of compassion (Psalm 86:15). When others neglect, He is so attentive that He knows every single hair on our heads (Luke 12:7). When others tear down, He is our Healer (Psalm 147:3). When others are uninterested, He is waiting to listen to our fears and to give us peace in return (Philippians 4:6-7).

Lord God, grant us the courage of Dinah. Help us to create a culture in our families that honors and respects women. If we have daughters, show us how to make sure they know their worth every single day. If we have ever doubted our own value, remind us how infinitely precious we are to You, no matter what we have suffered in the past. Heavenly Father, make fresh in our minds Your redeeming love and endless grace. Please bind up our deepest wounds, grant us the courage to forgive, and show us how to be an agent of healing for others.

Dinah Study Questions

1. Why do you think Dinah's story is recorded in the Bible?
2. How should we in the modern church minister to and treat the victims of sexual violence? Have you or a loved one experienced an assault? If so, are you still dealing with the trauma? What resources have been most helpful? What do you wish the church understood about helping in the aftermath of sexual violation?
3. What do we know about what kind of father Jacob was—both to his sons and his daughters?
4. How did Shechem and his family view Dinah and her worth? (Genesis 34:11–12)
5. Were Simeon and Levi justified in deceiving Shechem and his family? What about their decision to use the sign of God's covenant with His people: circumcision?
6. What does Jesus clearly tell us about the concept of mercy in Matthew 18?
7. What were the long-term ramifications of Simeon's and Levi's actions for themselves and their descendants? (Genesis 49:1–2, 5–7; Joshua 18:7; 21:21)

8. How does our relationship with our earthly father influence how we view our heavenly Father? If our earthly father has been less than ideal, how does Scripture point us to the truth about God and how he views us as His children? (Proverbs 15:3; Psalm 86:15; Luke 12:7; Psalm 147:3; Philippians 4:6–7)