

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 30

Chapter 34

In Genesis 33:17, Jacob had moved his family to Succoth during the first year of Joseph's life. Genesis 33:18 reveals that after living there for a while, Jacob moved his family to an area in Canaan called Shechem which was not its name at that time. It will assume that name after the death of Shechem in the story that follows in this chapter.

The specific year of these moves by Jacob cannot be found in the Scripture. However, at the beginning of chapter 36, Joseph is 17 years old, and it was 2259 years after the creation of Adam which sets a 17 year boundary during which all the events of chapters 34 through 36 must occur.

At the beginning of this chapter, Dinah had decided to visit the other girls in the area. On that outing, Dinah met Shechem who defiled her. Most likely, Dinah was no older than 3 when Joseph was born and Reuben was no older than 13. We do not know how old Dinah was at the time of the event in this chapter; however, a girl was considered of age to marry at 12 – 13 which indicates that at least 10 to 17 years had passed before this story transpired.

Dinah's Defilement

Genesis 34:1 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land.² **And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he took her and lay with her by force.**³ **And he was deeply attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her.**

Shechem was the son of Hamor. In the last chapter, Jacob bought land from Hamor for 100 sheep. For all that we know, that purchase was the third tract of land in Canaan owned by Abraham's family. Abraham had purchased the wells at Beersheba from Abimelech as well as the land and cave at Hebron from Mamre for his graves. With Jacob's purchase three pieces of property were now owned by Abraham's family.

Shechem was a prince in the land controlled by Hamor. When Dinah met Shechem, he took her by force and defiled her sexually. After that act, Shechem was still smitten with her and "spoke tenderly to her." We must ask if it was lawful for a Canaanite male to take a woman and do as he wished with her? What was the custom for taking a wife in the Canaanite customs? Abraham laid out the process for his descendants with the selection of Rebekah for Isaac. Jacob and Laban had followed the same general design for the marriages to Leah and Rachel. None of those women were taken by force. We do not know the answers to these questions but evidently a clash of cultures had occurred.

Shechem's Desire

Genesis 34:4 So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this young girl for a wife."

Shechem had already wed Dinah by the marriage act; however, he did not have Jacob's blessing. We have to wonder about the conversations that transpired between Shechem and Dinah. She may have loved Shechem in return, we do not know. Nevertheless, Shechem knew he needed his father's help to keep Dinah as a wife.

Father's Meeting

Genesis 34:5 Now Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter; but his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob kept silent until they came in. ⁶ Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. ⁷ Now the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it; and the men were grieved, and they were very angry because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done.

Evidently, Jacob heard of the defilement before he was formally approached by Shechem and his father. He did not address the issue immediately, but waited until he could tell his sons who arrived during the meeting with Hamor. For Jacob's family culture, this event was disgraceful and they were all filled with a mixture of grief and anger.

Hamor's Plea

Genesis 34:8 But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter; please give her to him in marriage. ⁹ And intermarry with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. ¹⁰ Thus you shall live with us, and the land shall be *open* before you; live and trade in it, and acquire property in it."

Hamor must have known that this event was egregious to Jacob and all his kin; therefore, he went to Jacob as a chief of the people, a diplomat of the land, to make an offer that, on face value, would benefit Hamor's people and Jacob's. Notice that Hamor offered to allow Jacob to use the land and purchase more as needed.

Shechem's Offer

Genesis 34:11 Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, "If I find favor in your sight, then I will give whatever you say to me. ¹² Ask me ever so much bridal payment and gift, and I will give according as you say to me; but give me the girl in marriage."

Shechem was not a diplomat in this meeting; he was a lovesick young man who was smitten with Dinah and was willing to pay the cost for the marriage whatever it might have been. He was not interested in a global reform of Canaanite/Israel relations; he wanted Dinah to be his legal wife in both cultures. This event represents a seed of theology that will be completed in the Law for the Jews.

Exodus 22:16 And if a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and lies with her, he must pay a dowry for her *to be* his wife.

Sons' Deceit

Genesis 34:13 But Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor, with deceit, and spoke to them, because he had defiled Dinah their sister.¹⁴ And they said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us.¹⁵ "Only on this *condition* will we consent to you: if you will become like us, in that every male of you be circumcised,¹⁶ then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters for ourselves, and we will live with you and become one people.¹⁷ "But if you will not listen to us to be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and go."

The issue with Shechem concerned circumcision; they did not want their sister to be married to an uncircumcised Canaanite. Furthermore, they did not want their future daughters to marry uncircumcised Canaanites. Notice that the sons of Jacob made this circumcision offer with deceit. We should never overlook such an important point. The sons of Jacob had a plan and it will soon be revealed. The offer was a "take it or leave it" opportunity. If all the men under Hamor's control did not agree to be circumcised, then the sons would take Dinah away from Shechem.

As a national ordinance for the descendants of Abraham in Genesis 17, circumcision was required by God to be the special sign to identify His chosen people and their abiding consecration to Him. These Canaanites did not meet the qualification and the mere suggestion by the sons of Jacob indicates that they did not understand the importance and deep meaning of the sign.

Shechem's Deed

Genesis 34:18 Now their words seemed reasonable to Hamor and Shechem, Hamor's son.¹⁹ And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. Now he was more respected than all the household of his father.

Here Shechem showed his exuberant willingness to pay whatever the price for the hand of Dinah was. What does the Scripture "**Now he was more respected than all the household of his father**" mean? Shechem had one desire – Dinah! Hamor must have had another desire yet to be

exposed for Moses to include this sentence about Shechem. When it says that Shechem "did not delay to do the thing" does not mean that he went immediately to be circumcised. It simply means that he was immediately willing to accept the agreement.

Men's Action

Genesis 34:20 **So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city, and spoke to the men of their city, saying,** ²¹ "These men are friendly with us; therefore let them live in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters in marriage, and give our daughters to them. ²² "Only on this *condition* will the men consent to us to live with us, to become one people: that every male among us be circumcised as they are circumcised. ²³ "Will not their livestock and their property and all their animals be ours? Only let us consent to them, and they will live with us." ²⁴ And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and to his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

At the city gate, Hamor, with his family, explained the potential agreement with the men of the village. On the positive side, men on both sides would be allowed to marry a bride from the other side. But then Hamor laid out his deceitful intention when he said, "**Will not their livestock and their property and all their animals be ours?**" Remember, Jacob was extremely wealthy although his family was relatively small. In this passage, Hamor revealed that he intended to absorb all of Jacob's wealth with this agreement. As chief of the people, Hamor gained the trust of the Canaanites and they were all circumcised without knowledge of the LORD God, the purpose of the sign or the requirements from God that would follow. In essence, the Canaanites accepted the outward sign of the true religion without an inward change of heart.

Two Son's Action

Genesis 34:25 **Now it came about on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came upon the city unawares, and killed every male.** ²⁶ And they killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went forth. ²⁷ Jacob's sons came upon the slain and looted the city, because they had defiled their sister. ²⁸ They took their flocks and their herds and their donkeys, and that which was in the city and that which was in the field; ²⁹ and they captured and looted all their wealth and all their little ones and their wives, even all that was in the houses.

Many commentators include all the sons of Jacob in this attack except Joseph. However, the text is clear that the attack was completed by two sons - Simeon and Levi. They slaughtered all the males under the control of Hamor and rescued Dinah. In addition, the sons took the wealth of Hamor and his neighbors. How could two men complete such carnage? Circumcision was not an

easy surgery to overcome and by the third day, all the men were in such pain that they could not defend themselves.

Jacob's Anxiety

Genesis 34:30 Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me, by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and my men being few in number, they will gather together against me and attack me and I shall be destroyed, I and my household."

Once physical life has been taken it cannot be revived. Jacob could do nothing to remedy the event. The Canaanites and the Rerizzites, two specific tribal groups of Canaan Land, lived in the same area. How would they respond to this slaughter? Jacob did not know and he was fearful. The sons had used a strategic tactic to gain dominance over the many, but fully functioning and healthy men with no injuries could surely dominate Jacob's small tribe.

Son's Answer

Genesis 34:31 But they said, "Should he treat our sister as a harlot?"

Simeon and Levi used the excuse that Shechem had taken Dinah by force and used her as if she was a harlot. It was good a good and proper excuse for Jacob's descendants but much less for the Canaanites.

Chapter 35

God's Instruction

Genesis 35:1 Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and live there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."

Because Jacob was concerned about the safety of his family after the slaughter described in the previous chapter, it was time for Jacob to have a meeting with the LORD. God told him to return to Bethel where he had met the LORD for the first time at least three decades before.

The village was still formally named Luz. Moses gave the name as Bethel here to identify the location so that all who read this Scripture will clearly know the location in the instruction.

Foreign Gods

Genesis 35:2 So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments; ³ and let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and has been with me wherever I have gone." ⁴ So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which they had, and the rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem.

How interesting! Jacob was allowing his children to worship false gods in rebellion to his belief in the one true God. Did Jacob allow Rachel to worship the teraphim she had stolen from her father? Were they the gods referred to in this passage or had the sons carved their own? Were they the gods they took from the spoils of Hamor's wealth? What did the rings in their ears mean? Why did they give them to Jacob? Jewelry worn on the head, ears, nose, wrists, belts, etc. was common among all women of all cultures at that time. However, such apparel was forbidden among male descendants of Abraham. In the cultures where men wore such rings on their ears, noses, heads, etc., they were almost universally required because of their worship of false gods as a symbol of submission. Jacob knew that he could not bring his family to the place where he had met the LORD with active idolatry in his family. He knew it was wrong. Somewhere in the area that Jacob named Shechem, the soil around an oak tree hides these images of false gods and religious trinkets that he buried.

Great Rumor

Genesis 35:5 As they journeyed, there was a great terror upon the cities which were around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

Jacob's fear of his Canaanite neighbors was incorrect; all the inhabitants of the Canaanite tribes had heard of the slaughter and feared Jacob enough to leave him alone.

Naming of Bethel

Genesis 35:6 So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. 7 And he built an altar there, and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed Himself to him, when he fled from his brother.

When he arrived in Luz, Jacob built another altar to the LORD God. Had three decades changed the terrain? Did he return to the same location of the first altar? We do not know; however, Jacob was extremely close to where he first met the LORD. He named the place "El-bethel." *El* means God and *Bethel* means door. Together they mean the door to God. It was the place where Jacob met the LORD when he saw the stairway reaching from earth to heaven.

Deborah's Death

Genesis 35:8 Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak; it was named Allon-bacuth.

In Genesis 24:61, Rebekah left her father's house in Haran and journeyed to Beersheba to become the wife of Isaac. That passage indicates that she took with her several maids; no doubt, Deborah was one of those maids. We think of a nurse as a person who gives medical care but Deborah was more than that to Rebekah; today, we would call her Rebekah's wet nurse.

Evidently Deborah had nursed Rebekah as a newborn; the Hebrew word for “nurse” means to *suck*. It was quite normal for a wet nurse to remain with the child she had fed as a babe for her entire life.

All commentators are in a quandary as to why Moses placed this statement between two important events, Jacob’s building of an altar in Bethel and God’s emphasizing the importance of his name being changed to Israel. Deborah had not been mentioned anywhere in the biblical record and neither had Rebekah or Isaac since Jacob’s return to Canaan. Had the families merged? No. Did Deborah come to visit Jacob and his family? Maybe. At the end of this chapter, Jacob joined his father in Hebron, indicating that Jacob had not merged the family yet. But none of that answers the question as to why the record of Deborah’s death is inserted in this place in the passage. We know of Sarah’s death, she was important to the story. We will hear of Rachel’s death and ultimately Rebekah’s by the end of the book. In the Scripture, the record of the death of women is rare, relegated to those who are important to the story; therefore, why was the death of a nurse included? Moses must have used the place of Deborah’s burial as a marker for all generations to know where Jacob built the altar. The English translation says “**Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died.**” The Hebrew text would be better translated “**Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, had died.**” In other words, Deborah had been buried in that location at some time before this event. When Deborah died, Isaac’s family must have been in the area and they buried her under a great oak tree. Such large trees were a rarity in the country and those that existed were often used as monuments and location markers. Deborah was buried under that tree and someone gave it the name “**Allon-bacuth**” which means *the oak of weeping*. Notice that Jacob did not name the tree; therefore, Deborah had already died years before and Moses simply used the burial place of Deborah to introduce the important oak tree that identified the place of Jacob’s altar to the LORD.

Jacob Called Israel

Genesis 35:9 Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. ¹⁰ And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; You shall no longer be called Jacob, But Israel shall be your name." Thus He called him Israel. ¹¹ God also said to him, "I am God Almighty; Be fruitful and multiply; A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, And kings shall come forth from you.
¹² "And the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, And I will give the land to your descendants after you."

For some reason, the LORD saw fit to keep reminding Jacob of His previous instructions and promises. He did the same thing with Isaac. Abraham needed no second or third reminder. The LORD wanted Jacob to begin using his new name, Israel, which means *God strives or God rules*. The name change came with a gift promised to the descendants of Abraham and Isaac and focused on the children of Jacob. The land will be a gift from God; neither Jacob nor his descendants will need to purchase any further plots of land in Canaan.

Luz Becomes Bethel

Genesis 35:13 Then God went up from him in the place where He had spoken with him.

14 And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He had spoken with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured out a libation on it; he also poured oil on it. 15 So Jacob named the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel.

Luz officially became Bethel in this passage. Almost three decades before, Jacob had set up a stone and poured oil on it in worship. This time, he added the libation to his worship. It was a liquid offering (called in Scripture a drink offering) to the LORD that will become important when the Law is given through Moses.

Rachel's Death Benjamin's Birth

Genesis 35:16 Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and she suffered severe labor. 17 And it came about when she was in severe labor that the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for now you have *another* son." 18 And it came about as her soul was departing (for she died), that she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. 19 So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). 20 And Jacob set up a pillar over her grave; that is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day.

The journey from Bethel to Ephrath is about 40 miles. Rachel was in the last days of her pregnancy with Benjamin on that journey. In Ephrath, the time for Benjamin's birth arrived. The birth was difficult and Rachel lived long enough after his birth to name him Ben-oni which means *son of my sorrow*. Jacob chose to call him Benjamin which means *son of the right hand*. With the loss of his beloved Rachel, the name means that Benjamin was particularly dear to Jacob. Benjamin's place in Jacob's heart will be born out with his overprotection of this child through the coming years.

A formal building was eventually constructed around the pillar set as a marker for Rachel's grave seen in the top picture to the right. Today the building has been fortified completely (middle picture to the right) and what was once just a spot along the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem where sojourners could stop to pay homage is now a major security area, revered and protected by the Jews. The lower picture show the entrance gate from the top picture surrounded by a fortress of walls. This tomb is the third most holy location in Judaism today.



Reuben and Bilhah in Eder

Genesis 35:21 Then Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.

^{22a} And it came about while Israel was dwelling in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard of it.

“Tower of Eder” means *tower of the flocks*. It was south of Ephrath/Bethelhem where a well was located to water the flocks on the way to Hebron. Israel had paused there on his journey for a short time, most likely to mourn the loss of Rachel before traveling on to join his father in Hebron.

During the period of grief over the death of Rachel, Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn committed a detestable act in God’s eyes. We know this because the Law will address such sin when it is given through Moses on Mt. Sinai. Reuben’s act will not go unchecked. Jacob may not have addressed this issue at this time, but he will not forget Ruben’s sin. He was the oldest and owned the birthright to all that belonged to his father. He will not receive his father’s wealth; he will lose his birthright; his father’s deathbed blessings upon each of his twelve sons will strip Reuben of his rightful place as the firstborn.

Twelve Sons

Genesis 35:22b Now there were twelve sons of Jacob-- ²³ the sons of Leah: Reuben,

Jacob's first-born, then Simeon and Levi and Judah and Issachar and Zebulun;

²⁴ the sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin; ²⁵ and the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maid: Dan and Naphtali; ²⁶ and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maid: Gad and Asher.

These are the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

Finally, at this point in the story, Moses sees fit to identify for the first time the 12 sons of Jacob according to their mothers, not by their birth order. All were born in Paddan-aram Haran except Benjamin who was born in Ephrath/Bethlehem.

Jacob with Issac in Hebron

Genesis 35:27 And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre of Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned.

Evidently, Isaac had moved from Beersheba to Hebron known in that day as Mamre of Kiriath-arba, some time during the last thirty years. Abraham called it the oaks of Mamre from whom he purchased the land, oaks and cave for the grave of Sarah.

Isaac's Age at Death/Burial

Genesis 35:28 Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years.²⁹ And Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, an old man of ripe age; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

Jacob had finally returned to his father after almost 30 years of separation. Because Isaac was not the focus of the story any longer, Moses summed up his life by stating that he was 180 years old at the time of his death and his twin sons participated in his burial. Although not stated here, later in the Book of Genesis Moses will indicate that he and Rebekah were buried in the cave with Abraham and Sarah at Mamre. We do not know when Rebekah died.

The placement of Isaac's death in this location in the Scripture presents a problem in the timeline of the lives and events of these last principal characters in the story. First, Isaac was 60 years old when Jacob and Esau were born and he lived 180 years. Second, Jacob lived 17 years after entering Egypt and died at the age of 147. Third, Joseph was elevated to second in control of Egypt at the age of 30. He stored supplies for seven years and then two years into the famine, he moved his father, brothers and their families to Egypt to care for them. Jacob was 130 at the time of the move and Joseph was 39; therefore, Joseph was born when Jacob was 91 years old as stated throughout these lessons. If Isaac lived to be 180, as stated in this passage, he did not die until Jacob was 120 and Joseph was 29 or 30. Therefore, Isaac lived 12 to 13 years after Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt at the age of 17, an event which will be revealed in chapter 37 of the Book of Genesis. Essentially, Isaac died close to the time that Joseph was being elevated to his high position in Egypt. Moses must have chosen to summarize the conclusion of the life of Isaac at this point in the story for some unknown reason just as he will summarize all the descendants of Esau through many generations that will extend well past 430 years of Egyptian bondage in chapter 36 and then return to the important story of Joseph at the age of 17 in chapter 37. Therefore, beginning with the last few verses of chapter 33, the strict chronological order of events is set aside and Moses sums up the complete story of Isaac, the complete story of the descendants of Esau and then flashes back to pick up the story of Joseph as a young man still in his father's house.

Isaac through Joseph

