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## "Get Me the Girl for a Wife": Feminist Readings of Genesis 34-35

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## ABSTRACT:

This article, originally written for “The Hebrew Scriptures: History, Theology, and Controversy,” considers the story of the rape of Dinah, exploring the text’s history and its traditional interpretations. Drawing on the work of Phyllis Trible’s *Texts of Terror*, the article proposes a feminist and liberatory reading of the passage, one that centers the personhood of Dinah and the other women of the story.

# “Get Me the Girl for a Wife”

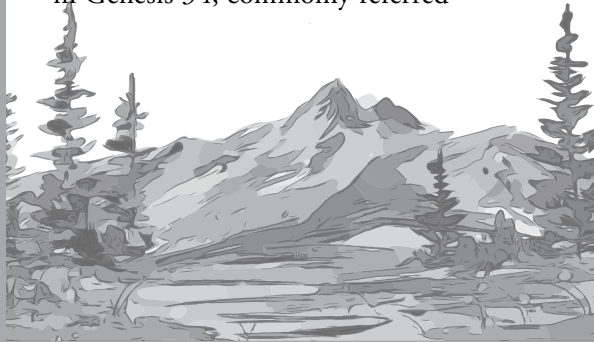
## Feminist Readings of Genesis 34-35

by Sister Jacqueline Sanchez-Small, OSB

*Caution: CW // sexual violence, rape, murder. The content of this paper addresses the aforementioned topics and the author would like to caution the reader of the upcoming sensitive content. This warning is meant to provide an opportunity to prepare for this category of content in the hopes of avoiding negative impact and promoting a safe space for engagement with the topic(s).*

## INTRODUCTION

The Bible primarily tells the stories of men: their visions and their callings, their transgressions and their redemptions. The story found in Genesis 34, commonly referred



to as The Rape of Dinah, is no exception.<sup>1</sup> The main actors in this piece are the Hivite rulers, Shechem and his father Hamor, and the earliest Israelites, especially Simeon, Levi, and their father Jacob. Yet at the center of this tragedy is a young woman, Dinah herself. Though there is not a single word of dialogue attributed to her in the text and her desires and opinions are not mentioned by the other characters or the writer(s), this story is fundamentally about her and her personhood. In fact, despite the violence that permeates the story, the abuse suffered by Dinah and other women in the tale, and the difficulty that commentators and interpreters have traditionally had in making meaning from this text, a feminist and even liberatory reading of the the story is possible. By engaging with the verses that follow the plot of Genesis 34 and considering the aftermath, described in Genesis 35, readers can encounter the possibility that the story holds an entirely different view of women, their bodies, and their autonomy than is obvious on the surface. Such a reading suggests that the text itself questions a culture of sexual exploitation and the easy acceptance of women as property.

Much of the commentary that has been written on this saga has not taken the beginning of Genesis 35 to be part of Dinah's story. By limiting her story to the events described in chapter 34, scholars have typically understood it to be a cautionary tale about the need to forbid intermarriage in order to create and preserve a cohesive national identity for the ancient Israelites. More recent analysis of the same section of the text has focused on whether to characterize Shechem's behavior toward Dinah as rape. These are legitimate questions with important implications about ethno-national identity and the status, rights, and agency of women in Jewish and Christian cultures. However, to solely look at these concerns risks missing the implications of a broader feminist analysis, which has potential to offer insight into God's concern for the marginalized and divine rejection of violations of women's bodies and dignity.

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1 Susanne Scholz, "Was It Really Rape in Genesis 34: Biblical Scholarship as a Reflection of Cultural Assumptions," in *Escaping Eden: New Feminist Perspectives on the Bible*, ed. H. C. Washington, S. L. Graham, P. Thimmes, (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

In this paper, I will begin with a summary of the story of Dinah, spanning from Genesis 34:1 to Genesis 35:12, and then will introduce the principles of feminist Biblical analysis and then apply those principles to this passage. Having presented this reading of the text, I will revisit common traditional interpretations of this story and consider them in light of the insights offered by feminist analysis.

## SUMMARY OF GENESIS 34-35

The saga of Dina is short and challenging. It begins with Jacob and his family, who are living on the outskirts of a Canaanite city shortly after reconciling with Esau. Dinah, his daughter with Leah, ventures out of the family compound to visit with local girls and young women and is noticed by the prince of the city who, like the city itself, is named Shechem. In quick succession, the Hebrew text says, “He saw her and took her and laid [with] her and demeaned her,” but then begins to speak to her tenderly, wishing to marry her. Word reaches Jacob, who is silent, while his sons are “grieved” and “burn with anger” because of the news.

When Shechem and his father Hamor come to ask Jacob’s permission to wed Dinah—a proposal which emphasizes the trade opportunities that would be possible between the family of Jacob and the tribe of Shechem and culminates in a vision of Jacob’s total assimilation into the Hivite people—her brothers deceitfully promise Dinah to Shechem, only if he and all males of his town will be circumcised in the Abrahamic tradition. Remarkably, Shechem and the men of the town agree to these terms, but the sons of Jacob attack the town while the men are still recovering from the operation. All the men are slaughtered and “carry off all their possessions, their women and children” (Genesis 34:27-30). Jacob chastises his sons, particularly Simeon and Levi who led the charge, and laments that the neighboring tribes will now hate and punish the family. Yet Jacob’s sons lack remorse, sardonically asking whether they should have allowed their sister to be “treated like a whore.”

Fearing what their surviving neighbors will do, Jacob and his family flee and return to Bethel at God’s instruction. Jacob tells his family to purify themselves and bury their statues of foreign gods. At the end of the journey, Rebecca’s nurse Deborah—never mentioned by name before this

verse—dies and is buried under another tree, which becomes known as the Oak of Weeping. Then, Jacob builds an altar, and God appears again, announcing “I am El Shaddai” and informing Jacob that “a nation, even a company of nations” will come from his line (Genesis 35:11).

Thus, this story, which begins with a rape and moves to men bartering over ownership of women before culminating in a widespread slaughter and mass rape and enslavement, concludes with a reverential depiction of women and their bodies. Deborah is mourned and wept over, and God speaks under the name El Shaddai, God of Breasts, promising a future of great fertility. This dramatic shift in the ways that women are depicted is significant and ought to raise questions about what the Scriptures have to say about the status of girls and women in the minds of readers and interpreters.

## PRINCIPLES OF FEMINIST INTERPRETATION

Analyzing any Biblical story from a feminist perspective while remaining true to the source material is a delicate balancing act. As the Pontifical Biblical Commission wrote, “To establish its positions, [feminist exegesis] must often, for want of something better, have recourse to arguments *ex silentio*...rejecting the content of the inspired texts in preference for a hypothetical construction, quite different in nature.”<sup>2</sup> A feminist reading that is not informed by the historical critical method risks losing the original context and intended meaning of the text entirely, as well as any moral lesson that these might have initially held. Yet failing to use a feminist method at all risks continuing to read Scripture and history in a way that compounds the oppression of women and misses an important layer of the depth and impact of these stories.

Phyllis Trible writes that a feminist hermeneutic may deal with Scripture in different ways:

“One approach documents the case against women. It cites and evaluates long neglected data that show the inferiority, subordination, and abuse of the female in ancient Israel and the early church. By contrast, a second approach discerns within

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2 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Concerning the Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” in *The Josephinum Journal of Theology* 6, no. 1 (Wint 1999), 5.

the Bible critiques of patriarchy. It upholds forgotten texts and reinterprets familiar ones to shape a remnant theology that challenges the sexism of Scripture...Yet a third approach incorporates the other two...[and] continues to search for the remnant in unlikely places.”<sup>3</sup>

Genesis 34:1-35:12 certainly presents ample evidence of “the inferiority, subordination, and abuse of the female.” No woman’s words are recorded, no woman’s wishes are considered, and the violation of Dinah is met with an escalation of even greater violence. The men of Shechem are murdered and all the women and children are “carried off” in a classic act of wartime rape and pillaging. Still, it is also possible to read this text with what Tribble calls “the second approach” to feminist analysis by noticing a few key ways in which the story challenges the sexism it relates.<sup>4</sup> In particular, the Shechem’s sexual exploitation of Dinah is termed “a thing which is not done in Israel,” (Genesis 34:7) and is in no way condoned. Perhaps more unequivocally “feminist” is the episode in Bethel described in Genesis 35, when Jacob’s family honors and mourns a woman, Deborah, and the God of Israel appears, using a feminine image as a name and giving instructions and encouragement.

To hold both of these realities of the text in tension is the work of the so-called When combined approach. In doing so, we find that Genesis 34:1-35:12 paints a nuanced picture: Dinah’s story is one that is concerned with the ways that women are viewed, controlled, and dominated in both the private and political spheres, and it is also one that refuses to let this status quo stand unchallenged, by God and by the readers.

## FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF DINAH’S STORY

Though Dinah is silent throughout the story, she is the first actor and sets the plot in motion by choosing to “go out” with the intention of seeing or visiting with the daughters of the land. From this detail, something of her character emerges: she is interested in relationality with her same-sex peers in a way that is developmentally appropriate for a young girl

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3 Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives (40th Anniversary Edition)*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2022), 3.

4 see Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror*.

or woman. She is inquisitive, curious about what lies beyond her tribe, and is something of a free agent, someone with a viewpoint of her own who knows that there are people and places that she can see. But in being seen, she begins to be objectified, both grammatically and sexually. Never again the subject of another sentence after Shechem rapes her, she becomes a totem of intermarriage itself, desired by those who want to profit from connecting with the Israelites, and violently guarded by her brothers whose goal is to prevent assimilation into the surrounding tribes.

Even their rhetorical question to their father—“Should our sister be treated as a whore?” (Genesis 34:31)—reveals that her brothers’ concerns have little to do with her safety, honor, and sense of autonomy. They do not ask, “Should our sister be humiliated?” or “Should our sister be abused?” Prostitution, after all, is fundamentally about the exchange of money for access to sex. By objecting to her “being treated as a whore” rather than by objecting to the suffering she experienced, Simeon and Levi show that they are primarily troubled by the prospect of a business deal with Shechem, not by the effect that the sexual encounter had on her.

Dinah’s personhood seems to disappear behind these violent exchanges of men. A woman or girl in her society had no opportunity to consent or refuse, no meaningful way to protest or praise anything, be it a marriage proposal or a massacre. Still, the story remains interested in Dinah and in the value of women more broadly, in the harm done to women in the frequently brutal business of acquiring a wife. This is perhaps most visible in the editorial remark in verse 7, which refers to the encounter between Shechem and Dinah as, “The senseless thing he had done in Israel... such as should not be done.” This phrase is clearly the work of an editor operating long after the patriarchal era. Not only does the editor refer to “Israel” as a place rather than to the person Jacob, the editor also utilizes language identical to the cry of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13:12. Attempting to fight off a rape by her brother, Tamar says, “Such a thing should not be done in Israel!” By including these words in Dinah’s story, the text connects her to a different kind of community, a lineage of women. The idea of Dinah as a voiceless victim cut off from her people is complicated here by this textual connection to Tamar, who would come many

generations later but who knew the same kind of suffering and could speak out against it. Tamar's words are recorded as part of the narration, but they are, in a sense, Dinah's too.

The text continues to explore women's issues and women's humanity in Genesis 35 immediately after the family leaves Shechem. First, there is the death of Deborah, Rebecca's nursemaid, who is buried and mourned. As a nursemaid, her body had been a means of nourishment for Rebecca, sustaining her through childhood so that she could grow to become a mother of Jacob and Esau. However, Deborah was more than a source of sustenance for the infant Rebecca. She had gone with Rebecca when she married, according to Genesis 24:59, and presumably continued to provide support for the family as the following generations passed. The oak under which she is buried is named Allon Bacuth, which means the "tree of mourning" or "tree of weeping," evoking a picture of the family's grief at her death. In life, her female body did the difficult, powerful work of nursing: whatever she may have suffered as a servant, the text wants to portray her here as valued and beloved and generative. The way that Dinah was treated, as an object and as a pawn, is not the way that the text expects women to be viewed.

Finally, God appears, seeming to bring this story to its real end. In a speech to Jacob, the God of the patriarchs says, "I am El Shaddai," echoing an earlier theophany made to Abraham (Genesis 17:1). Though אֱלֹהֵי שָׁמַיִם is variously translated as "God Almighty" or "God of the Mountains," there is compelling evidence that it is more literally translated as "God with Breasts,"<sup>5</sup> with שָׁדַי for a root.<sup>6</sup> Biale shows that throughout the Hebrew Bible, El Shaddai is used for God most commonly in connection with fertility blessings, a tradition which seems to be intentionally connecting the flourishing of the people and their generations with the nursing breasts of their God. This passage is no exception to that rule. God arrives on the scene and blesses Jacob and his line, promising a future of great prosperity and safety, and chooses to do so under the name "God of Breasts." This image is particularly powerful

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5 David Biale, "The God with Breasts: El Shaddai in the Bible," *History of Religions* 21, no. 3 (February 1982): 240-256.

6 See Genesis 49:25, Job 3:12, Job 24:9, etc.



and poignant in the wake of the abuse of Dinah and the Hivite women of Shechem. Here, God is choosing to identify with and be visualized as the female body, in all of its life-sustaining power and abundance. This choice is an unequivocal rejection of the normalization of violence against women, a sign that God is aligned with those whose personhood has been so ignored. Ushering in kind of a new creation by commanding Jacob to “Be fruitful and multiply,” God once again seems to want to start anew (Genesis 35:11). This command is famously first given in the Creation narrative, but it appears again in Genesis 8:17 and Genesis 9:1 and 9:7, after the flood and the sinfulness that precipitated it. God issues this charge to Jacob here at the start of a new beginning, perhaps similarly disgusted by the violence in Shechem. Perhaps this is indicative that God, claiming the image of a female body and drawing on the family’s respect for Deborah, God met Jacob in Bethel to invite him to envision a culture in which gender and sexual norms are rooted in what is generative rather than in grasping for power and domination over others. This vision has not come to pass so many millennia later, but the hope for such a culture remains alive.

#### OTHER INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TEXT

Of course, Biblical interpreters through the ages have approached this difficult text with different questions and come to different conclusions. A murky story, theologically and ethically, with a plot that lurches from horror to horror and does not mention God until the aftermath, it is unsurprising that Dinah’s story has not inspired as much analysis as many other Genesis stories. Philo briefly addresses the story in “On the Migration of Abraham,” and “On the Change of Names,” treating it as an allegory in which Dinah represents righteousness and Hamor foolishness.<sup>7</sup> Origen refers to only one verse from this story in his Homilies on Genesis. Commentaries by the medieval rabbis offer little that is helpful. Reflecting the sexist mores of their time, the rabbinic commentaries in Bereishit Rabba speculate that Dinah must have “gone out dressed

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7 Louis H. Feldman, “Philo, Pseudo-Philo, Josephus, and Theodotus on the Rape of Dinah,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 94, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 253-277.

as a prostitute.”<sup>8</sup> Rashi and others primarily comment on the text with conjectures about the specific sexual acts to which Shechem subjected Dinah.<sup>9</sup> In modern times, Walter Brueggemann seemed to speak for the majority of Biblical scholars when he observed in his commentary on Genesis that “this narrative will surely not be widely used in theological exposition.”<sup>10</sup> Since the medieval period, most scholars who engage the text have focused on two main themes: examining this story’s view of intermarriage and exploring the encounter between Shechem and Dinah.

*The Threat of Intermarriage*

It is clear from even a superficial reading that the text is part of the conversation within the Hebrew Bible about whether intermarriage is permissible for Israelites.<sup>11</sup> According to the judicial code provided in Deuteronomy and Leviticus, Shechem’s actions did not merit capital punishment and certainly would not call for the wholesale destruction of the offender’s city.<sup>12</sup> For many early scholars, the excessive violence committed by Dinah’s brothers is the central mystery of the story, the point from which to begin drawing interpretations.

Simeon and Levi’s rage may have stemmed in part from fraternal affection for Dinah, but if their main concern was Dinah’s wellbeing, then by the standards of the time it should have been enough for Shechem to marry and provide for her. Instead, their actions suggest that what is really at stake here is the notion of cultivating a holy people, a distinct Israelite nation not easily absorbed by its larger, more powerful neighbors, or “disgraced” by its women’s sexual contact with uncircumcised men

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8 Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: the Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation*, (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985), Chapter 80, verse 1.

9 Rashi asserts in *Genesis Rabbah* 80:2 that, when the text says Shechem “laid her and debased her,” the first verb refers to vaginal rape and the second refers to anal rape. This kind of seemingly pedantic and prurient commentary is a rather absurd example of Kugel’s third assumption of the ancient interpreters: “The Bible...is perfectly harmonious...and ought not to contradict itself or repeat itself needlessly.” See James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now*, (New York: Free Press, 2007), 15.

10 Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982).

11 Cana Werman, “Jubilees 30: Building a Paradigm for the Ban on Intermarriage,” *Harvard Theological Review* 90, no. 1 (January 1997): 1.

12 Alexander Rofé, “Defilement of Virgins in Biblical Law and the Case of Dinah (Genesis 34),” *Biblica* 86, no. 3 (2005): 371.

(Genesis 34:14). Even if their outrage for Dinah made them unwilling to accept the proposal, they might have stopped once they had killed Shechem and Hamor, the parties who are directly involved. Instead, they seem to see the whole tribe as guilty—verse 27 states that they “came upon the city which had defiled their sister”—and they “carry off the women,” as the conquests of war. Not only does this sever any potential for goodwill relations with their neighbors, it indicates that their fury is not based in moral outrage over rape and violence against women.

Although Jacob disapproves of the massacre, he seems to affirm Simeon and Levi’s basic isolationist tendency when he commands his family to bury their idols as they flee to Bethel. The defilement of Dinah and the destruction of Shechem turn the family of Jacob toward insularity that goes beyond safeguarding the honor of individual families. With their daughters sexually unavailable to any neighboring tribes, the Israelite families belong only to each other with shared resources, shared destiny, and a shared understanding of themselves as part of the covenant with their God.

The tension between being a part of the broader society and being a people set apart runs throughout the history of the Israelites and is a recurring theme in Scripture. This was perhaps never more true than in the post-Babylon exile era of the fourth century BCE,<sup>13</sup> during which time this story was written according to scholars including James Kugel.<sup>14</sup> Anxieties over intermarriage and securing a common ethno-religious identity would have been especially prominent in such a setting. Whether the story of Dinah had already been circulating for generations or was introduced at that point, its writer(s) structured the piece in a way that reflects the values and fears of its time, warning that violence is part and parcel of assimilation. A feminist hermeneutic holds this collective identity crisis in consideration and asks what the experience of Israelite women had been during the exile and aftermath and what meaning or message a story like this may have had for those seeking God’s comfort in such a time. Would it be encouraging for members of the post-exilic community to hear a story that connected survivors of violence across

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13 Alexander Rofé, “Defilement of Virgins in Biblical Law and the Case of Dinah,” 375.

14 James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible*, 170.

the ages with each other and with them? Would the promise of God's maternal nature and the share in divine generativity promised to Jacob have been a source of strength for those who wrote and heard this story? *Was It Really Rape?*

The feminist hermetic described by Phyllis Tribble also brings something to bear in the more recent conversation this text has sparked. Since the rise of the feminist movement of the 1970s, there has been a gradually increasing awareness of sexual assault and gender-based violence throughout much of society. Against the backdrop of modern conversations and controversies around sexual violence, much of the modern analysis of this story has centered on the question of whether Dinah was raped at all. Part of the difficulty in understanding exactly what happened between Shechem and Dinah lies in the reality that the culture in which Dinah lived and the culture that formed the writer(s) of her story did not conceptualize rape like twenty-first century Westerners do. As Lyn M. Bechtel writes, “what modern society calls ‘rape’ is described in several Hebrew Bible texts, but there is no specific term for ‘rape’ in Hebrew.”<sup>15</sup> The terminology used in Genesis 34:2 is, therefore, of great interest. Verse two lists four verbs with Shechem as the subject and Dinah as the object. First, he “saw” her; in a reversal of Dinah’s intention to “see” the daughters of the land—her peers—she is “seen” by a foreign prince who will exert power over her. Next, he “took” her, and the writer uses the word “תָּקַח,” “lkh” which can mean “take” or “seize” in the broad sense, and often refers to “taking as a wife.” Then, Shechem “laid her,” or, as some translations render it, “lay with her.” The English phrase sounds crude without the word “with,” and the Hebrew text, too, suggests crudeness. It lacks any preposition, though the verb “בָּרַחַ” “skb,” which means “lay,” typically is followed by a preposition when it is used to denote sexual relations.<sup>16</sup> Another instance in the Scriptures in which “בָּרַחַ” is used without a preposition is the 2 Samuel story of the rape of Tamar. In that passage, too, the event is described with a string of simple verbs and has a woman as the direct object. Phyllis Tribble writes of

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15 Lyn M. Bechtel, “What If Dinah Is Not Raped? (Genesis 34).” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 19, no. 62 (June 1994): 19–36.

16 See Genesis 30:15 and 16, Genesis 39:10, Deuteronomy 22:28 etc.

that instance, “The Hebrew omits the preposition to stress his brutality. ‘He laid her.’ If the repetition of verbs confirms the predictability of his act, the direct object ‘her’ underscores cruelty beyond the expected.”<sup>17</sup> This wording indicates that Shechem’s sexual encounter with Dinah is not based in mutual desire or seduction. It is something that he does to her, not with her. The fourth and final verb in the sequence is “עָרַבָה” “‘innâ,” which is often translated, “he defiled her,” “he degraded her,” or “he humiliated her.” Allison Joseph argues compellingly that the meaning of “עָרַבָה” is “about sex, but is not the sex act itself. [עָרַבָה] is about social shame.”<sup>18</sup> Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the word refers to sexual encounters that are damaging to a woman’s dignity,<sup>19</sup> whether or not it necessarily corresponds to the act of rape as it is typically defined today. Whether Dinah objected to having sex with Shechem is thus irrelevant. With or without consent, the act “lowers her status as a virgin daughter”<sup>20</sup> and so is inherently degrading. This ambiguity has opened the door for interpreters to question the long-held assumption that Shechem forced Dinah or that he subjected her to painful or demeaning sex acts.

Scholars who read the story as being about a forbidden and transgressive sexual experience rather than an act of violence note that Shechem’s actions do not fit with the stereotypical behavior of rapists. After the sexual encounter, he “speaks tenderly” to Dinah and then tries to act properly according to the customs of an honor-based society, going so far as to be circumcised in order to marry her. Scholz notes that many readers are skeptical that a man who loved a woman enough to wish to marry her and is willing to get circumcised in order to gain her family’s approval would be capable of raping her.<sup>21</sup> While in contemporary society we know that intimate partner violence can happen within marriages, even in relationships in which the partners believe themselves to be in

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17 Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 46.

18 Joseph, Alison L. “Understanding Genesis 34:2: ‘Innâ.” *Vetus Testamentum* 66, no. 4 (2016): 666.

19 For example, the word is used in Genesis 16:6, referring to Sarai’s harsh treatment of Hagar after Hagar bears a son for Abraham. This is certainly not rape, but is cruelty with a sexual element. The word is also used repeatedly in Exodus, referring to the status of Israel under the Egyptians.

20 Joseph, “Understanding Genesis 34:2,” 666.

21 Scholz, Was It Really Rape in Genesis 34,” 228.

love, it is true that Shechem's behavior is markedly different from other rapists in the Hebrew Bible. For example, in 2 Samuel, Amnon rapes Tamar and immediately loathes her and casts her out of the house. And while Hamor's conversation with Jacob is a lengthy business proposal that hardly mentions Dinah, Shechem's own plea is similar to Jacob's discussion with Laban about marrying Rachel, whom he loved and treated well.<sup>22</sup> Reading him as an earnest, if impatient, suitor supports the idea that this story is about intermarriage as a threat to the whole Israelite community rather than about the concerns, traumas, and desires of a particular Israelite woman and her family.

Nonetheless, it is important to remember that at a fundamental level, the question of whether Dinah was legally raped according to the standards of her society is moot. The feminist analysis outlined by Tribble reminds readers that Dinah left home with no intention of visiting with men but quickly found herself the object of Shechem's lust and then his family's desires. Even if she was interested in sex with him, "in ancient Israel, young women simply did not have control over their sexuality."<sup>23</sup> For Shechem to engage with her sexually without tribal permission expresses a disregard for the proper channels of her society that regarded her as a part of a family network. Notably, there is no mention of what happens to Dinah during or after the fall of the city, no hint of whether the reversal of fortunes horrifies or delights her. Whether her story is read as an incident of rape or a tragic romance, there is no way to avoid the fact that she is a victim of male violence repeatedly. But an explicitly feminist hermeneutic of Biblical interpretation offers a different lens to read her story, a worldview in which she is both the victim of violence and a person with dignity.

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22 Shechem says, in Genesis 34:11-12, "I will find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me, I will give...but give me the young woman as a wife" and Jacob says, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel, your little daughter." Both reveal a willingness to give something of significance, but Shechem's offer reads as a bit cold, not mentioning Dinah by name and calling her "הַרְעֵנִי" "the na'arah" in contrast to Jacob's personal way of referring to his bride to be as "הַיְגֵנְתִּיךָ הַיְתִיב לְתָרָה" "Rachel, biteka haketanah."

23 Joseph, "Understanding Genesis 34:2," 665.

## CONCLUSION

What are we to make of the story of Dinah? How can this story be read and understood in a time when violence against women remains widespread throughout the world? Certainly, its historical context is important. This text was written down at a time when the Israelite people were deeply invested in understanding themselves as distinct from their neighbors, resisting the temptation to be assimilated into a more prosperous society. With that in mind, the brothers' intensity in rejecting a wedding does make sense, even if it remains morally repugnant.

While it is difficult to read this tale of violence begetting violence and feel spiritually edified, there are hints of “the remnant” of hope described by Tribble. Dinah is the first character to make a decision in this passage, choosing to expand her circle and seek out the company of others in a way that suggests something of her character. The text does not mince words when it describes her fate, inviting the readers to enter into her pain rather than to condemn her or minimize her suffering. Verse 7 even connects her to another woman in a similar circumstance, perhaps an editorial gesture of compassion that reminds readers to see her as part of a broader lineage of survivors of violence. Finally, if interpreters allow the story to continue beyond Genesis 34:31, into the first sections of Genesis 35, they might find space there for a fuller, more nuanced interpretation. By continuing to read into the next chapter, with a feminist view that seeks truth and hope, readers who seek to understand what this story has to say to women find a different closing: one in which female bodies and sexuality are dignified, cherished, sacred, and, ultimately, triumphant over the destruction and death that permeate the story.



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