

**Notes on Genesis 8:
Women with Stories: Dinah and Tamar
(Genesis 34, 38)
Fretheim Explores Genesis,
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Women in Genesis

- ◆ Women play a crucial role in many places in Genesis
- ◆ This emphasis rises from two basic concerns:
 - Both male and female made in the image of God. Both are equal
 - ❖ Patriarchal structures rose after sin entered into the world
 - The importance of family life in the Genesis narratives.
- ◆ Woman we have studied so far:
 - Eve (not the temptress as often thought)
 - Sarah and Hagar (wives of Abraham)
 - Rebekah (wife of Isaac)
 - Leah and Rachel (wives of Jacob)

Dinah (Chapter 34)

Background

- ◆ The only daughter of Jacob; her mother was Leah
- ◆ There is only a bare notice of her birth.
- ◆ Her story is picked up again in chapter 34, where Dinah is raped by Shechem, son of Hamor, member of the ruling family in a neighboring Canaanite town
 - The rape is condemned, a vicious act, an outrage on Israel.
 - However, Shechem, the rapist, falls in love with Dinah.
- ◆ The Law of Deuteronomy 22 and Exodus 22 also requires that the rapists must marry the woman he rapes (still a law in some African and Indian cultures today)
 - Law in ancient Israel required that he must live with her and support her for the rest of her life; he cannot divorce her
 - Rationale of law:
 - ❖ Upholds the woman's honor.
 - ❖ Grants her economic and social status.
 - ❖ Gives her a family, community to live with.
 - ❖ The alternative: "spoiled goods," life of the outcast, poverty

Dinah's Silence

- ◆ Dinah is only talked about.
- ◆ She goes to live with Shechem, then her brother takes her away.
- ◆ She is only "done to."
- ◆ She has no voice in the story.

- Why is Dinah silent? Deliberate?
- What lies behind her silence?
- Raises for us the question of society's treatment and attitude towards women who have been raped. How do we today try to uphold the honor, the economic and social status of such women?

The response of Dinah's brothers to the rape: the hijacking of religious symbols for the purposes of violence

- ◆ Arrangements are made between Jacob and Hamar for the marriage of Dinah and Shechem
- ◆ However, Dinah's brothers do not want the integration of the families. They devise a ruse using religious symbols and practices:
- ◆ They ask that all members of Shechem's family be circumcised
- ◆ Then, while the male members of Shechem's family "are all still in pain," the brothers come and:
 - Kill all the men
 - Rape and carry away all the women
 - Take away the children and property
 - Take Dinah back.
- ◆ Jacob curses the instigators Simeon and Levi for their violence

God's Apparent Absence

- ◆ God is never mentioned in Genesis 34.
- ◆ God seems absent from the story. There seems to be no protection from violence and evil for the individuals in the story

Tamar (Chapter 38)

Background: The Story of Tamar

- ◆ Judah is one of the sons of Jacob.
 - Judah's line is the line that will eventually lead to David and Jesus.
- ◆ Judah's son Er married Tamar, who was not a Jew -- she was probably a Canaanite woman.
 - Er dies without an heir.
 - We are told he was evil and God put him to death. It is rare that God puts any individual to death in the Old Testament.
 - By law, Er's brother is obligated to marry in order to carry on the name of her dead husband, so that his name will be remembered down through the generations.
- ◆ Onan, Er's brother marries Judah.
 - uses *coitus interruptus* to keep Tamar from getting pregnant (he would then receive the inheritance given to the oldest from Judah).
 - He dies (God puts him to death; we don't know the means. Again, it is rare for God to put an individual to death).

- ◆ The third son of Judah, Shelah, is too young at the time, but Judah promises him to Tamar.
 - But Judah later reneges on his promise and responsibility.
- ◆ So Tamar takes it upon herself to provide an heir for her dead husband Er:
 - Judah's wife dies.
 - Tamar dresses as a prostitute (she takes off her widow's garments, which she will put on again afterwards).
 - Judah uses her, but Tamar obtains his staff and ring before sex.
- ◆ Tamar then becomes pregnant with twins.
 - Judah says she should be put to death, for she has played the whore
 - Tamar brings out Judah's staff and ring
 - Judah in verse 26 recognizes he has done wrong, and he declares Tamar more righteous than he.
- ◆ Tamar has twins
 - The second born Perez carries on the line of promise.

Faithfulness to a Relationship May Require Going Beyond Law

- ◆ Tamar's act of prostitution would normally be considered an offensive act and condemned. Yet Judah calls it a "righteous" action.
- ◆ It may be necessary to disobey one law in order to obey another.
- ◆ Tamar takes responsibility to provide a heir. She assumes an activity that normally would be condemned in order to do justice to the familial relationship.
- ◆ "Relationships are more important than rules; faithfulness may mean going beyond the law." (Ref. 2)
- ◆ "Virtues may emerge from within a relationship would never make some kind of abstract list."

Jesus and Prostitutes

- ◆ Jesus may have been thinking of the story of Tamar when he says (Matthew 21:31): "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you." (NRSV)
- ◆ How should the church respond to the men and women engaged in prostitution?

God Can Work Through "Outsiders"

- ◆ Tamar is an outsider who is faithful to the chosen family, the family of promise
- ◆ Another example of how God can work through the outsider

References

- ◆ 1. Video series: **Fretheim Explores Genesis**. Luther Productions. St. Paul. 2000. (Available from: <http://www.lutherproductions.com/bibleseries.htm>)
- ◆ 2. "The Book of Genesis. Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections." Terence E. Fretheim. In: **The New Interpreter's Bible, A Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Volume I**. Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1994.