

Grace in Thine Eyes

Bible Study Guide

The story before us is a tale of sharp contrasts:
pastoral simplicity and grim violence,
love and revenge, candor and duplicity.

E. A. Speiser, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis*

Read Genesis 34:1 ***Out She Goes***

1. In the whole of this dramatic chapter, only the first verse reveals something Dinah *did*. Henceforth events happen *to* Dinah, while her own actions, thoughts, and feelings go unrecorded. Why might that be the case in her time and place? As to Dinah's parents, Genesis 29:31–35 offers a summary of the early years of Leah's loveless marriage to Jacob. Given such a history, how do you imagine Leah treated Dinah? And what sort of father might Jacob have been to the daughter of his less-favored wife? Ralph Elliott (*The Message of Genesis*) believes "the sordid events of chapter 34 indicate a spiritual relapse on the part of Jacob." Read Psalm 53:2–3, then keep that unfortunate possibility in mind as this biblical story unfolds.

2. According to scholars, Dinah may have been as young as twelve or as old as sixteen; in any case, she was unmarried and, it appears here, unsupervised when she ventured forth among her pagan neighbors, despite the fact that girls of marriageable age were not permitted to go abroad without an escort. Some commentators paint her as "blameless" and "naive" when she "innocently" took a walk. Others see her as "impulsive, indiscreet Dinah" who "showed the bad judgment to run away from her well-ordered home." What evidence, if any, do you find in this verse to support either view? One point worth noting: Dinah hoped to meet the *daughters* of the land, not the sons. What reasons—legitimate or otherwise—might you offer for a young Israelite woman to "visit some of the Canaanite women" (GW)?

Read Genesis 34:2 ***A Tragic Turn of Events***

3. Shechem was both the name of a city and the name of this "prince of the land" (NASB), whom scholars peg as an adolescent, not much older than Dinah. As stated in Genesis 12:6–7, the Canaanite land was promised to Abram's descendents. Yet, according to Genesis 33:18–19, how much land did Jacob settle for, and how did he acquire it? What are the inherent dangers of living among a pagan people? Read 2 Corinthians 6:14–17 for a New Testament perspective.

4. The same Hebrew word is used for Dinah "seeing" the women and for

Shechem “seeing” Dinah. Herbert Lockyer (*All the Women of the Bible*) interprets Shechem’s actions in this way: “He *saw her* means he lusted after her,” bringing to mind Job’s vow in Job 31:1. We’re also reminded of 2 Samuel 11:2–3, in which David “saw” Bathsheba with the same devastating result. What do the following verses tell us about focusing our gaze in the right direction: 1 Chronicles 16:11; Psalm 25:15; Hebrews 12:2?

5. There are as many renderings of the Hebrew verb *inna* as there are translations—“defiled” (KJV), “humbled” (RSV), dishonoured” (NEB), “forced” (NRSV), “disgraced” (AMP) —but the ugly truth of it was, Shechem “raped her” (MSG). The verbs come in quick succession, indicating an impetuous act—“saw, took, violated”—yet some commentators suggest “something more subtle going on between the lovestruck young prince and the adventurous daughter of Jacob,” even that “she was thrilled and made herself easily available to him.” What conclusion do *you* draw from this unsettling verse?

Read Genesis 34:3 *A Change of Heart*

6. The abrupt reversal in Shechem’s behavior is inconsistent with most rapists, biblical or otherwise. Read 2 Samuel 13:1–15, then contrast Amnon’s cruel postrape treatment of Tamar with Shechem’s tender attitude toward Dinah, often translated in poetic terms: “his soul clave unto Dinah” (KJV) and “he was deeply attracted to Dinah” (NASB). Since Shechem’s emotions and actions are described by the narrator instead of through the young man’s own words or viewpoint, does that make his turnabout more genuine? How might you explain such a change of heart?

7. As John Calvin (*Genesis*) notes, “Although he embraced Dinah with real and sincere attachment, yet in his lack of self-control he sinned greatly.” Galatians 5:19, Ephesians 4:19, and 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5 describe such flagrant sins. In Shechem’s gentle words do you hear repentance worthy of her forgiveness? Or was he merely persuading Dinah to see things his way?

Read Genesis 34:4 *A Decent Proposal*

8. When Shechem’s own words appear, his impulsive nature is evident once more. The verb tense is imperative, with no sense of “please,” nor did he invoke Dinah’s name; rather, he used the common Hebrew word for “girl,” rather than the more respectful word for “maiden.” No response is noted from Hamor, perhaps because marriage was the expected outcome. Though this Canaanite family was not bound by the same laws as the Israelites, a social code existed to address such situations, as later recorded in Exodus 22:16–17 and Deuteronomy 22:28–29. How do those commands suit the scenario at hand?

9. Today we would find the notion of a woman marrying her rapist

repulsive; in Dinah's time the alternative was worse. Consider Tamar's tragic end in 2 Samuel 13:16–20. Had Shechem cast Dinah aside, she would have been forced to live under her father's roof for the rest of her life, bereft of marriage prospects, alone and unloved, since a raped woman was no longer eligible for marriage to another. Though the Lord is silent in this chapter of Genesis, Dinah did not suffer unseen. What comfort do Psalm 10:14 and 22:24 offer those who feel abused and neglected?

Read Genesis 34:5 *Another Speechless Father*

10. Hamor's silence is understandable; Jacob's is not. According to 2 Samuel 13:21, how did David react when he learned Tamar had been defiled? Yet Jacob kept quiet until his sons returned home. What practical reasons might explain why "Jacob held his peace" (KJV)? Commentators suggest that he was "shocked into silence, sorrow and, perhaps, indecision," though "given the shame inflicted on Dinah, Jacob should have been more proactive." What do Psalm 62:8, Proverbs 3:1–2, and Isaiah 55:6 recommend in so difficult a situation? Since Jacob did none of those things that we know of, what might that tell us about his spiritual state?

Read Genesis 34:6–8 *Anger Management*

11. Hamor and Jacob had done business before. But this time it was personal. Were the sons of Jacob justified in their fury? What do the following verses tell us about anger: Psalm 4:4; Psalm 37:7–8; Ephesians 4:31? Matthew Henry (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*) suggests their anger was influenced "rather by jealousy for the honour of their family than by a sense of virtue."

12. For a further understanding of "a disgraceful thing in Israel," read the following verses where the same Hebrew phrase appears: Deuteronomy 22:21; Joshua 7:15; Judges 20:6. Note how Hamor didn't even mention his son's detestable crime. Instead he quickly attempted to defuse the volatile atmosphere, assuring them "the soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter" (NASB). What conciliatory words do you find in this initial proposal?

Read Genesis 34:9–12 *Let's Make a Deal*

13. Daughters? Real estate? What a magnanimous offer! Was Hamor being generous...or crafty? James Murphy (*Barnes' Notes: Genesis*) describes Hamor's plan as "a political alliance or amalgamation of the two tribes, to be sealed and actually effected by intermarriage." Yet what advice had Jacob's father, Isaac, offered concerning marriage to a Canaanite, as recorded in Genesis 28:1? And Isaac's father, Abraham, before him, in Genesis 24:3–4?

14. Before Jacob or his sons responded, Shechem addressed the

primary issue at hand: marrying Dinah. Do you think he was talking politics or passion when he pleaded, “Let me find grace in your eyes” (KJV)? Might he also have been seeking the family’s forgiveness? Though Shechem did not confess his sin, his *carte-blanche* compensation makes his guilt clear. And this time he didn’t call Dinah merely “girl” but the more proper term for “young woman.” How would you describe his behavior here, compared to that of verse 2?

Read Genesis 34:13–14 *Like Father, Like Sons*

15. According to Clyde Francisco (*The Broadman Bible Commentary*), Jacob’s very name means “heel-grabber...schemer, supplanter.” See Genesis 27:36–38 for proof of Jacob’s conniving ways. Is it any wonder his sons offered “a dishonest reply” (NEB), “a misleading answer” (GW)? Why might Jacob’s sons be negotiating with Hamor, rather than allowing their father to speak for the family?

16. At first the young men seem to reject the idea of marriage altogether, because “that were a reproach unto us” (KJV). John Hartley (*New International Biblical Commentary: Genesis*) explains that “disgrace” was “a potent term in societies structured around the concept of honor” and would have been “readily understood as a nonnegotiable condition by Hamor and his son.” To be reproached was to be looked down upon by all of society, as described in the following verses: Psalm 44:13; Jeremiah 24:9; Ezekiel 5:14.

Read Genesis 34:15–17 *An Outrageous Demand*

17. Drastic as it sounds, circumcising adult males was a common practice among Israel’s neighbors as a prenuptial ritual. But to ask *all* the Shechemites to submit to the knife was over the top. Jonathan Kirsch (*The Harlot by the Side of the Road*) calls it “a kind of rough justice.” Does it appear that Jacob’s sons consulted him before making this offer? And what of their rash promise that the Canaanites and Israelites would become “one people”? How would that have honored the God of Jacob? According to Genesis 17:10–11, what unique purpose did God have for circumcision? Was that the brothers’ intent in requiring circumcision? Matthew Henry comments, “Religion is never more injured, nor are God’s sacraments more profaned, than when they are thus used for a cloak of maliciousness.”

Read Genesis 34:18–19 *A Fool in Love*

18. Micah 7:5 offers sage advice that would have benefited both father and son. But Hamor was thinking “land,” and Shechem was thinking “love”; both men were deceived and “gladly agreed” (NLT). Even so, Shechem’s credibility moves up several notches. “Held in respect above anyone in his father’s house” (NEB), he “hurried off to get everything done,” because “the young man was so smitten with Jacob’s daughter” (MSG). All through this narrative Shechem’s love for Dinah has been

made abundantly clear, as were Isaac's feelings for Rebekah in Genesis 24:67 and Jacob's affection for Rachel in Genesis 29:18. Why was Shechem's love for this Israelite girl, however genuine, not honorable in God's eyes?

Read Genesis 34:20–24 *Just One Thing*

19. Father and son faced a difficult task: convincing their neighbors of the value of being circumcised. Note the "one condition," however painful, is surrounded by a plethora of enticements—what Gerhard von Rad (*Genesis: A Commentary*) calls "a little diplomatic masterpiece"—including livestock and goods which Jacob's sons had never offered. Yet again, Shechem's crime was not confessed and Dinah was left out of the discussion. Why might that have been the case?

20. No protest was recorded; all the Shechemites "listened and heeded" (AMP), submitting to the operation, oblivious to impending disaster. Nothing was said of the religious significance of circumcision. Do we have any indication that these Shechemites planned to worship the God of Jacob? What does Deuteronomy 7:6 later state about God's chosen people?

Read Genesis 34:25 *Brutal Vengeance*

21. "On the third day" (NKJV) is a common idiom in Scripture. You'll find three significant examples in Exodus 19:16–17, Esther 5:1–2, and Luke 24:7. Derek Kidner (*Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*) tells us, "Crudely performed, circumcision could be quite incapacitating, particularly after two or three days." The two blood brothers of Dinah planned their attack when the Shechemites were at their most defenseless as Simeon and Levi "boldly entered the city...and slew all the males" (AMP). They must have employed stealth and cunning to kill so many men without any retaliation from the women or from those yet to be killed. Perhaps they slew the men at night while they slept in their beds—a ruthless, despicable act. Jacob's assessment of these vengeful brothers years later is well stated in Genesis 49:5–7.

Read Genesis 34:26 *Ruthless Rescue*

22. Two victims in particular are mentioned by name; lest we wonder if father and son escaped the brothers' wrath, they did not. The Hebrew idiom "put to the sword" appears nearly three dozen times in the Old Testament. As Robert Alter (*Genesis: Translation and Commentary*) explains, the phrase literally means "'the mouth of the sword'—hence the sword is said to 'consume' or 'eat' in biblical language." When we read Deuteronomy 13:12–18, we see God requiring his people to behave precisely as the brothers did in Shechem. How do you reconcile God's approval of such violence elsewhere and the inexcusable behavior of Simeon and Levi here?

23. Shechem, as a wealthy prince, had his own house. Was Dinah held captive there against her will? Or did Shechem gain her trust and win her heart? Commentators differ on the subject, some suggesting she was “held as a hostage,” others that she was “a willing and perhaps even a loving guest.” How do you view the situation? The key is, her brothers did not bother to consult Dinah. Instead they “took” their sister and “went forth” (NASB), the same verbs used earlier when Dinah “went out” and Shechem “took” her. Are the brothers heroes...or abductors? See if you can make a case for either possibility, then consider Matthew Henry’s comment concerning the rescue of Dinah: “if that was all they came for, they might have done that without blood.”

Read Genesis 34:27–29 *Heartless Revenge*

24. By “sons of Jacob,” is the narrator suggesting all of Jacob’s sons were involved in the looting of Shechem, or only Simeon and Levi? Some translations offer an answer—“And the other sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city” (NRSV)—while other scholars point out that only Simeon and Levi are mentioned as the instigators elsewhere in the story. How do you read this passage?

25. Two men or too many, “all this was done because of the horrible thing that had happened to their sister” (CEV). Literally, it means “where *they* defiled their sister,” *they* being the men of the land. It seems the lads held everyone responsible, not just young Shechem. Look back at verse 23. Do you note a sad irony between the promise of verse 23 and the reality of verse 29, when the brothers took “everything they could lay their hands on, both inside the town and outside in the fields” (NLT)?

Read Genesis 34:30 *Stinking to High Heaven*

26. Note whom Jacob took to task. How might that answer question 24? “Making a stench” is better translated, “muddied the waters.” The brothers stirred up trouble, in other words. See Joshua 6:18 and 7:25 for similar uses of this Hebrew phrase. As Matthew Henry commented, “When sin is in the house, there is reason to fear ruin at the door.” Even so, Jacob’s response was sadly lacking in compassion—for the slain Shechemites or for his abused daughter. Who or what was Jacob concerned about? If his fears were justified, what should a godly father have done? Deuteronomy 4:29, Isaiah 55:6, and Hosea 10:12 point the way.

27. Warren Wiersbe (*Be Authentic*) notes, “The name of the Lord isn’t mentioned once in this chapter, and the wisdom of the Lord is surely absent as well.” Do you find any concern for the Lord’s judgment in Jacob’s words? What do Deuteronomy 10:12–13, Psalm 22:23, and 1 Samuel 12:20 require of God’s people?

Read Genesis 34:31 *Not with Our Sister*

28. It seems Simeon and Levi had the last word in this sordid story. Note they spoke in one voice here. Though their words were phrased as a question, the brothers were speaking rhetorically; obviously the answer was, “No, he should *not!*” Are they still blaming the whole tribe or only Shechem here? Jonathan Kirsch believes the brothers considered the outcome “peace without honor, a disgraceful sellout” and therefore ground out “an accusation that seems to apply even more to Jacob himself than to Shechem or Hamor.” Though we may long for some response from Jacob, Gerhard von Rad explains, “The ancient reader, who felt more than we do the burning shame done to the brothers in the rape of Dinah, will not have called them wrong.”

29. We are not told Dinah’s fate. Though her name means “justice,” little was afforded her. One subsequent mention of her appears in Genesis 46:15. Since no husband or children are mentioned, we may deduce that she remained unmarried and childless. What hopes do you hold for Dinah?

30. God’s patience with this flawed, patriarchal family—and with us—is further proof of his forbearance and his love. As Clyde Francisco wisely observed, “If God can only use perfect people to accomplish his purposes, all is lost.” God continued to use imperfect Jacob; he can use us, too. What promises in the following verses assure you of that truth: Genesis 28:15; Zephaniah 3:17; Psalm 146:5–6?

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