

Gen. 33:18-34:31

וישלה

The Rape of Dinah

This story of rape and cruel retribution puts Jacob's family in a different light. While the basic theme also occurs in other literatures (e.g., the tale of Helen of Troy), the biblical tale reflects a particular aspect of Israel's tribal history and fits into the overall pattern of the Jacob tragedy, with deception once again playing a central role.

An introduction of three verses (Gen. 33:18-20) forms the link between this section and the preceding. Jacob has now settled down and, since his children are seen as adults, much time has elapsed since he and Esau met at the river Jabbok.

בְּדִינָה בְּתֵי עֵקֶב וַיָּאֵהֵב אֶת־הַנֶּעֱרָ וַיְדַבֵּר עַל־לֵב
 הַנֶּעֱרָ: וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂכֵם אֶל־חָמוֹר אָבִיו לֵאמֹר קַח־לִי
 אֶת־הַיְלָדָה הַזֹּאת לְאִשָּׁה: וַיַּעֲקֹב שָׁמַע כִּי טָמֵא
 אֶת־דִּינָה בְּתוֹ וּבָנָיו הָיוּ אֶת־מִקְנֵהוּ בַשָּׂדֶה וְהִחְרַשׁ
 יַעֲקֹב עַד־בֹּאֵם: וַיֵּצֵא חָמוֹר אֲבִי־שְׂכֵם אֶל־יַעֲקֹב
 לְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ: וּבָנֵי יַעֲקֹב בָּאוּ מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה כְּשֶׁמְעֵם
 וַיִּתְעַצְבוּ הָאָנָשִׁים וַיִּחַר לָהֶם מְאֹד כִּי נָבְלָה עָשָׂה
 בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל לְשֹׁכְבֵי אֶת־בְּתֵי־עֵקֶב וְכֵן לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה: וַיְדַבֵּר

* הַנֶּעֱרָ קָרִי. הַנֶּעֱרָ קָרִי.

18] Jacob arrived safe in the city of Shechem which is in the land of Canaan—having come thus from Paddan-aram—and he encamped before the city. 19] The parcel of land where he pitched his tent he purchased from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for a hundred *kesitahs*. 20] He set up an altar there, and called it El-elohe-yisrael.

1] Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. 2] Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, and took her and lay with her by force. 3] Being strongly drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden, he spoke to the maiden tenderly. 4] So Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as a wife."

5] Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah; but since his sons were in the field with his cattle, Jacob kept silent until they came home. 6] Then Shechem's father Hamor came out to Jacob to speak to him. 7] Meanwhile Jacob's sons, having heard the news, came in from the field. The men were distressed and very angry, because he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter—a thing not to be done.

33:18] *Shechem*. An old Canaanite city, which had been visited previously by Abraham (Gen. 12:6). In later Israelite history it became an important religious and cultural center of the tribal confederacy (Josh. 24:1). Shechem, Hebrew for shoulder, is located in the area of today's Nablus, thirty-two miles north of Jerusalem, and is built on the slope of a large rise that is part of Mount Gerizim. Recent excavations show that the site was occupied as early as 4000 B.C.E.

19] *Shechem's father*. Shechem is also the name of the king's son, a major figure in the Dinah story. *A hundred kesitahs*. Monetary unit of unknown value.

/In Job 42:11 the giving of a *kesitah* resembles the payment to a victor in Sumerian verbal disputations./

20] *El-elohe-yisrael*. *El*, God of Israel.

34:2] *Hivite*. The Septuagint has "Horite" (see note at Gen. 36:2).

By force. Literally, "lay with her and forced her." Such an offense brought guilt on the offender's whole community (Gen. 20:9; Deut. 24:4).

/According to the law of Deut. 22:28–29, if a man has violated a virgin, he has to marry her and is prohibited from ever divorcing her. In addition, her father is to receive compensation./

5] *In the field*. Most probably they did not return home every night.

7] *Outrage in Israel*. An idiomatic term (cf. Deut. 22:21; Jer. 29:23) that is an anachronism here, since Israel did not yet exist.

חמור אתם לאמר שכם בני חשקה נפשו בביתכם ^ט לכם אם תהיו כמנו להמל לכם כל־זכר: ונתנו
 תנו נא אתה לו לאשה: והתחתנו אתנו בנתיכם ^ט את־בנותינו לכם ואת־בנותיכם נקח־לנו וישבנו אתכם
 תתגור־לנו ואת־בנותינו תקחו לכם: ואתנו תשבו ^י והיינו לעם אחד: ואם־לא תשמעו אלינו להמול
 והארץ תהיה לפניכם שבו וסחרוה והאחזו בה: ^י ולקחנו את־בתנו והלקנו: וייטבו דבריהם בעיני
 ויאמר שכם אל־אביה ואל־אתיה אמצא־חן בעיניכם ^{יא} חמור ובעיני שכם בן־חמור: ולא־אחר הנער לעשות
 ואשר תאמרו אלי אתן: הרבו עלי מאד מהר ומתן ^{יב} הדבר כיתפץ בבת־יעקב והוא נכבד מפל בית
 ואתנה כאשר תאמרו אלי ותגור־לי את־הנער לאשה: ^{יב} אביו: ויבא חמור ושכם בנו אל־שער עירם וידברו
 ויענו בני־יעקב את־שכם ואת־חמור אביו במרמה ^{יג} אל־אנשי עירם לאמר: האנשים האלה שלמים הם
 וידברו אשר טמא את דינה אחתם: ויאמרו אליהם ^{יד} אתנו וישבו בארץ ויסחרו אתה והארץ הנה רחבת־
 לא נוכל לעשות הדבר הזה לתת את־אחתנו לאיש ^{יד} זדים לפניהם את־בנותם נקח־לנו לנשים ואת־בנותינו
 אשר־לו ערלה כיתרפה הוא לנו: אד־בזאת נאות ^{טו} נתן להם: אד־בזאת יאתו לנו האנשים לשבת
 * יב הנערה קיי.

8] And Hamor spoke with them, saying, "My son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him in marriage. 9] Intermarry with us: give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. 10] You will dwell among us, and the land will be open before you; settle, move about, and acquire holdings in it." 11] Then Shechem said to her father and brothers, "Do me this favor, and I will pay whatever you tell me. 12] Ask of me a bride price ever so high, as well as gifts, and I will pay what you tell me; only give me the maiden for a wife."

13] Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor—speaking with guile because he had defiled their sister Dinah— 14] and said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised, for that is a disgrace among us. 15] Only on this condition will we agree with you: that you will become like us in that every male among you is circumcised. 16] Then we will give our daughters to you and take your daughters to ourselves; and we will dwell among you and become as one kindred. 17] But if you will not listen to us and become circumcised, we will take our daughter and go."

18] Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem. 19] And the youth lost no time in doing the thing, for he wanted Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most respected in his father's house. 20] So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the public place of their town and spoke to their fellow townsmen, saying, 21] "These people are our friends; let them settle in the land and move about in it, for the land is large enough for them; we will take their daughters to ourselves as wives and give our daughters to them. 22] But only on this

10] Move about. The verb סָחַר (*sachar*) has a dual meaning, "to move about" and "to trade." It reflects ancient social conditions when to move about also meant a license to trade [1].

12] Bride price. Not "dowry" (money the bride brings to the groom), as מָהָר is often translated.

13] Jacob's sons. Probably led by Simeon and Levi. The others may have assented by silence (see Gen. 34:25).

Guile. מִרְמָה (*mirmah*), a key word in the Jacob story (see Gen. 27:35).

20] Public place. Literally, "gate."

כח וַיָּבֹאוּ הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר טָמְאוּ אַחֲוָתָם: אֶת־צֹאֲנָם וְאֶת־
 בָּקָרָם וְאֶת־חֲמֹרֵיהֶם וְאֶת־אֲשֶׁר־בְּעִיר וְאֶת־אֲשֶׁר
 כט בַּשָּׂדֶה לְקָחוּ: וְאֶת־כָּל־חִילָם וְאֶת־כָּל־טָפְם וְאֶת־
 נְשֵׁיהֶם שָׁבוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר בַּבַּיִת:
 ל וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־שִׁמְעוֹן וְאֶל־לֵוִי עַכְרָתָם אֲתִי
 לְהִבְאִישׁוּנִי בִישָׁב הָאָרֶץ בְּכַנְעֲנִי וּבְפִרְזֵי וְאֲנִי מָתִי
 מִסָּפֶר וְנֶאֱסַפּוּ עָלַי וְהַכּוֹנֵנִי וְנִשְׁמַדְתִּי אֲנִי וּבֵיתִי:
 לא וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַכּוֹזְנֵה יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־אֲחֹתֵנוּ: פ

condition will the men agree with us to dwell among us and be as one kindred: that all our males become circumcised as they are circumcised. 23] Their cattle and substance and all their beasts will be ours, if we only agree to their terms, so that they will settle among us.” 24] All who went out of the gate of his town heeded Hamor and his son Shechem, and all males, all those who went out of the gate of his town were circumcised.

25] On the third day, when they were in pain, Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob’s sons, brothers of Dinah, took each his sword, came upon the city unmolested, and slew all the males. 26] They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword, took Dinah out of Shechem’s house, and went away. 27] The other sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the town, because their sister had been defiled. 28] They seized their flocks and herds and asses, all that was inside the town and outside; 29] all their wealth, all their children, and their wives, all that was in the houses, they took as captives and booty.

30] Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have brought trouble on me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and Perizzites; my men are few in number, so that if they unite against me and attack me, I and my house will be destroyed.” 31] But they answered, “Should our sister be treated like a whore?”

23] *If we only agree.* In his attempt to persuade his people, Shechem is careful to depict the advantages of attracting Jacob’s family but passes over his own involvement with Dinah.

24] *All who went.* That is, all his fellow townsmen.

25] *Simeon and Levi.* Full brothers of Dinah. They probably had their personal retinue with them.

Unmolested. Literally, “in peace,” referring to the brothers. Others translate as “unawares,” referring to the inhabitants [2].

27] *The other sons.* At the end of his life, Jacob will blame only Simeon and Levi for the slaughter of Shechem and his people (Gen. 49:5-7).

30] *You have brought trouble on me.* Or, “you have muddied what was clear,” a reference to his reputation [3].

31] *Our sister.* Thereafter, nothing further is heard of Dinah.

/Tradition has her variously as the mother of Saul the Canaanite (cf. Gen. 46:10), as Job’s second wife, or as the mother of Asenath [4]./

The Tragic Element

Obviously, the Bible does not retell this violent tale of rape and murder merely "because it happened." Many other incidents in the rich and varied lives of the Patriarchs were probably forgotten. Why not this one?

A partial answer lies in the fact that this incident would later serve to explain the landless status of Simeon and Levi. The Levites became hereditary temple servants without a territory of their own (Num. 18:20), while a portion of the tribe of Simeon seems to have intermingled with the tribe of Judah and also with the Canaanites. This may explain the startling difference between the census figures in Num. 1 (59,300) and Num. 26 (22,200) and the complete omission of Simeon in the blessing of Moses (Deut. 33). The story of the rape of Dinah may thus have helped to provide a moral explanation for certain geopolitical realities of later centuries.

The incident at Shechem must also be seen as another chapter in the Jacob tragedy. As a youth, Jacob had practiced deceit; now two of his sons dishonor themselves and him by deceiving the people of Shechem. Dinah, Simeon, and Levi are the first three children with whom Jacob has profound trouble; Judah, Reuben, and Joseph will follow in time. Jacob has become Israel but this fact has not erased the tragic element from his life. Quite the contrary, his perception and deep sensitivity have brought him a greater capacity for suffering. His children, who represent his future, will bring him untold agony. This long-range retribution visited on Jacob also underscores the Bible's condemnation of the hypocritical concern for religion with which Jacob's sons induced Shechem and his people to submit to circumcision. The story of Dinah exposes this pretense of faith in all its ugliness [5].

The Reprimand

Jacob's castigation of his sons is so weak that it is puzzling. He seems worried only that his own reputation will suffer. To be sure, he will speak more strongly on his deathbed (Gen. 49:5-7), but how is it possible that he would view the unwarranted killing of so many people merely as having brought trouble to himself?

Some critics say that there were two separate strands of the Dinah story. Jacob's response, they say, belonged to a tradition (attributed to J) that told of the slaying of only Hamor and Shechem, an act that could have appeared as justifiable retribution and that would elicit the reprimand now found in the text. The story of the killing of the city's inhabitants, they say, stems from another tradition (P), one which had no record of Jacob's reaction. But however persuasive this argument seems, we must approach the text as it is now. And it here portrays the biblical Jacob as a man who makes no moral judgment on his sons.

Jacob is silent because he has in fact nothing to say. He has already become the object of events and has entered the twilight of his life. He is still young enough to become a father once more, but he is already too old to be in sole command of his fate. The divine blessings that follow (in chapter 35) merely reiterate what has already been vouchsafed to him in the past, and Jacob returns to Bethel as if symbolically to revisit the earlier stages of his life. This is what men do when growing old. In Jacob's case, however, old age will betoken not serenity but further trials. It thus becomes painfully clear that "Israel" was merely a name, not a reward; a potential, not a fulfilment. Literally and figuratively, Jacob will limp through the remainder of his life.

GLEANINGS

Exculpation

Later tradition attempted to explain the guile and cruelty of the brothers: Why were the men of Shechem slain along with Hamor, the offending leader? Because they countenanced the crime or were incapable of restraining their leadership, either of which rendered them co-responsible. [6]

The Prayer of Judith

[In the Book of Judith, probably of the second century B.C.E., the deed of the brothers was seen as pious retribution.]

O Lord, God of my father Simeon, into whose hand You gave a sword to take vengeance on the strangers who loosened the girdle of a virgin to defile her. . . . [Your dear children] were moved with zeal for You and abhorred the pollution of their blood and called upon You for aid. O God, O my God, hear me also who am a widow.

JUDITH [7]

Dinah

How was Shechem attracted to the young girl? One tradition says that she went out to see the pagan revelries; another, that she pranced about bedecked with jewelry—and jewelry ought to be worn only inside the house. [8]

Goethe called her "this foolish Dinah who runs about in the land." [9]

The Deed

I am not one of those people who profess to be able to distinguish between good and bad warfare, who say that good fighters are those who observe certain humanitarian rules according to which warfare should be regulated. And combatants when they make excuses for their brutal or tricky reprisals by pointing to the cruelty or unscrupulousness of their opponents seem to me as absurd as were your brothers when they said it was because Shechem had "defiled" Dinah, their sister, that they did this. For war between men, no matter how it is waged, is abominable. . . .

. . . It was a brutal deed of my sons there in Shechem, and I, innocently thinking I was doing good, had been a party to its inception. Nor could I put a stop to it once it was under way; much as I abhorred what they were doing; I could hardly make war on my own sons. But, when I looked upon the foul thing they had done after all my teaching, I thought how like it was to the behavior of a child who, left unwatched, will break the careful training of its mother and befoul itself.

IRVING FINEMAN [10]

me favorably. ¹¹Please accept my present which has been brought to you, for God has favored me and I have plenty." And when he urged him, he accepted.

¹²And [Esau] said, "Let us start on our journey, and I will proceed at your pace." ¹³But he said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me; if they are driven hard a single day, all the flocks will die. ¹⁴Let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I travel slowly, at the pace of the cattle before me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir."

¹⁵Then Esau said, "Let me assign to you some of the men who are with me." But he said, "Oh no, my lord is too kind to me!" ¹⁶So Esau started back that day on his way to Seir. ¹⁷But Jacob journeyed on to Succoth, and built a house for himself and made stalls for his cattle; that is why the place was called Succoth.^a

¹⁸Jacob arrived safe in the city of Shechem which is in the land of Canaan—having come thus from Paddan-aram—and he encamped before the city. ¹⁹The parcel of land where he pitched his tent he purchased from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for a hundred *kesitahs*.^b ²⁰He set up an altar there, and called it El-elohe-yisrael.^c

34 Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. ²Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, and took her and lay with her by force. ³Being strongly drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden, he spoke to the maiden tenderly. ⁴So Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as a wife."

⁵Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah; but since his sons were in the field with his cattle, Jacob kept silent until they came home. ⁶Then Shechem's father Hamor came out to Jacob to speak to him. ⁷Meanwhile Jacob's sons, having heard the news, came in from the field. The men were distressed and very angry, because he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter—a thing not to be done.

⁸And Hamor spoke with them, saying, "My son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him in marriage. ⁹Intermarry with us: give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves: ¹⁰You

^a Meaning "stalls," "huts," "booths."

^b Heb. *qesitah*, a unit of unknown value.

^c "El, God of Israel."

will dwell among us, and the land will be open before you; settle, move about, and acquire holdings in it.”¹¹ Then Shechem said to her father and brothers, “Do me this favor, and I will pay whatever you tell me. ¹²Ask of me a bride-price ever so high, as well as gifts, and I will pay what you tell me; only give me the maiden for a wife.”

¹³Jacob’s sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor—speaking with guile because he had defiled their sister Dinah—¹⁴and said to them, “We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised, for that is a disgrace among us. ¹⁵Only on this condition will we agree with you; that you will become like us in that every male among you is circumcised. ¹⁶Then we will give our daughters to you and take your daughters to ourselves; and we will dwell among you and become as one kindred. ¹⁷But if you will not listen to us and become circumcised, we will take our daughter and go.”

¹⁸Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor’s son Shechem. ¹⁹And the youth lost no time in doing the thing, for he wanted Jacob’s daughter. Now he was the most respected in his father’s house. ²⁰So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the ^apublic place^a of their town and spoke to their fellow townsmen, saying, ²¹“These people are our friends; let them settle in the land and move about in it, for the land is large enough for them; we will take their daughters to ourselves as wives and give our daughters to them. ²²But only on this condition will the men agree with us to dwell among us and be as one kindred: that all our males become circumcised as they are circumcised. ²³Their cattle and substance and all their beasts will be ours, if we only agree to their terms, so that they will settle among us.” ²⁴All ^bwho went out of the gate of his town^b heeded Hamor and his son Shechem, and all males, ^ball those who went out of the gate of his town,^b were circumcised.

²⁵On the third day, when they were in pain, Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob’s sons, brothers of Dinah, took each his sword, came upon the city unmolested, and slew all the males. ²⁶They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword, took Dinah out of Shechem’s house, and went away. ²⁷The other sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the town, because their sister had been defiled. ²⁸They seized their flocks and herds and asses, all that was inside the town and outside; ²⁹all their wealth, all their children, and their wives, all that was in the houses, they took as captives and booty.

^{a-a} *Lit. “gate.”*

^{b-b} *I.e., all his fellow townsmen.*

³⁰Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my men are few in number, so that if they unite against me and attack me, I and my house will be destroyed." ³¹But they answered, "Should our sister be treated like a whore?"

35 God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and remain there; and build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau." ²So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Rid yourselves of the alien gods in your midst, purify yourselves, and change your clothes. ³Come, let us go up to Bethel, and I will build an altar there to the God who answered me when I was in distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." ⁴They gave to Jacob all the alien gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the terebinth that was near Shechem. ⁵As they set out, a terror from God fell on the cities round about, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

⁶Thus Jacob came to Luz—that is, Bethel—in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. ⁷There he built an altar and named the site El-bethel,^a for it was there that God had revealed Himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

⁸Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and was buried under the oak below Bethel; so it was named Allon-bacuth.^b

⁹God appeared again to Jacob on his arrival from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. ¹⁰God said to him,

"You whose name is Jacob,
You shall be called Jacob no more,
But Israel shall be your name."

Thus He named him Israel.

¹¹And God said to him,

"I am El Shaddai.^c
Be fertile and increase;
A nation, yea an assembly of nations,
Shall descend from you.
Kings shall issue from your loins.

¹²The land that I assigned to Abraham and Isaac

^a "The God of Bethel."

^b Understood as "the oak of the weeping."

^c Cf. 17.1.