

# GENESIS—WEEK 28

## JACOB ARRIVES



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is The Reconciliation of Jacob and Esau by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) on display at the Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh*

After failing to understand that Esau has totally forgiven him, Jacob (now Israel) suddenly begins acting like a new man. He builds a proper altar to the LORD and names it appropriately.

Yet God has one more test in store for Israel. His sons destroy a town in revenge for the rape of their sister, and Israel has to flee yet again.

But this time, he clears house, ridding the place of pagan gods, and sees the LORD's miraculous response.

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Thank you.

Genesis 33:12–35:8 — *Jacob Arrives*  
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1 Genesis 33:12–17 (ESV)

*Then Esau said, “Let us journey on our way, and I will go ahead of you.” But Jacob said to him, “My lord knows that the children are frail, and that the nursing flocks and herds are a care to me. If they are driven hard for one day, all the flocks will die. Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, at the pace of the livestock that are ahead of me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.”*

*So Esau said, “Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me.” But he said, “What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord.” So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.*

There’s a wonderful scene in “Goodwill Hunting” of a dialogue between the psychiatrist and Will:

<i>“It’s not your fault.”</i>	<i>“I know.”</i>
<i>“It’s not your fault.”</i>	<i>“I know!”</i>
<i>“It’s not your fault.”</i>	<i>“I KNOW!”</i>
<i>“It’s not your fault.”</i>	<i>“DON’T MESS WITH ME MAN!”</i>
<i>“It’s not your fault.”</i>	Will breaks down crying,

Breakthrough, at last. Will is starting to get it, and healing is about to begin. There’s a lesson like that for Christians—one that we memorize and “know,” but we don’t really get.

You are forgiven. You are forgiven. You are forgiven. Just as Jacob cannot accept that Esau has really, fully forgiven him, many of us cannot accept that God has really, fully forgiven us.

God’s forgiveness is straight in-your-face forgiveness. He didn’t miss anything. He knows what you did.

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Consider the parable of the vineyard laborers in Matthew 20:1–16. The laborers who only worked one hour got the same pay as the ones who worked all day. Some folks interpret this passage as saying that life’s not fair. That’s wrong; grace *is* fair. It would be unfair only if someone got less than they deserved.

But let’s give the vineyard parable a twist. Imagine if the 11<sup>th</sup> hour laborers were the ones complaining. They struggled to accept their excessive pay; it offended their sense of fairness. Silly, right?

Maybe not. Do you struggle to accept God’s grace? Do you really think it’s okay that you’re forgiven?

We all have an innate sense of justice, which can be triggered even when we’re not the victim. So, how about when we’re the beneficiaries? Can that bother us too?

What do you do when a waiter doesn’t charge you for something? Pointing it out will make extra work and maybe embarrass him. Do you just bump the tip to make the total right? Is that even acceptable?

God’s grace is much more. We can’t make the “total” right. We have to just relax and let Him be God.

2 Genesis 33:18–20 (NIV)

*After Jacob came from Paddan Aram, he arrived safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan and camped within sight of the city. For a hundred pieces of silver, he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent. There he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel.*

This paragraph marks a major turning point. Just when it seems that Jacob may never grow up, he does two things right. He erects a proper altar instead of a pagan pillar, and he embraces his new name.

Shechem is where Abraham built his first altar (see Gen. 12:7). Now Jacob builds one (or maybe even rebuilds Abraham’s original one). Previously, Jacob had only built pillars (see Gen. 28:18 and 31:51-52). Pillars are a pagan practice that God hates (see Deut. 16:22). Rebuilding Abraham’s first altar (or building a new one where the old one was) is huge. Jacob appreciates the family covenant and embraces it. He then labels the altar in a significant way.

El-Elohe-Israel means, “God, the God of Israel.” This is nothing short of declaring the covenantal blessing for himself. The God of Abraham and Isaac is now the God of Israel. He lays claim to the birthright and the blessing.

Jacob has found his destiny.

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Any Christian serious enough to read these devotionals is serious enough to have a magnificent destiny. Unfortunately, most Christians can’t picture themselves that way. Imagining yourself changing the world is frightening. We all know that God transformed Simon the fisherman into Peter the apostle, but we think of that as an extreme case. “That’s nice, but it’s not me.”

Don’t be so sure. God has this curious habit of using people in amazing ways. If He only used the obvious candidates for great things, it wouldn’t glorify Him all that much, would it?

No. Instead, He uses flawed people like Jacob, and Simon, and you, and me to do things we could never imagine. He delights in spectacular twists and turns. He is anything but boring.

We should seek our destiny. But before we can even start seeking what God has in store for us, we need to jettison the attitude that our destiny is on the couch. The first step is facing the truth. Are you really willing to be used of God for His purposes?

Don’t forget, staying on the couch avoids a lot of suffering. Serving the LORD isn’t safe. Getting ready to seek God’s calling means getting ready for the unexpected—good and bad. This is a big prayer request.

Are you up for it? Ask Him to prepare you to be called.

*“The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.”* — Henry David Thoreau

3 Genesis 34:1–12 (ESV)

*Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land. And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humiliated her. And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, “Get me this girl for my wife.”*

*Now Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah. But his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came. And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. The sons of Jacob had come in from the field as soon as they heard of it, and the men were indignant and very angry, because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing must not be done.*

*But Hamor spoke with them, saying, “The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him to be his wife. Make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. You shall dwell with us, and the land shall be open to you. Dwell and trade in it, and get property in it.” Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, “Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give. Ask me for as great a bride price and gift as you will, and I will give whatever you say to me. Only give me the young woman to be my wife.”*

The timeline here is troubling. Jacob worked for Laban for 14 years for Rachel and Leah. Dinah was born near the end of that time. He worked for 6 more years before leaving. Dinah has to be at least 6 years old when they left but not much more.

How old is Dinah now? Jacob and his family stayed at Succoth long enough to build booths but Succoth wasn't their final destination. Shechem is just a stopover along the way. Still, there's nothing in the text that precludes longer stays.

The Hebrew word in verse 3 that is translated as “young woman” literally means “adolescent,” but the word translated as “girl” in verse 4 means “child.” Nevertheless, the experts seem to agree that Dinah was *not* pre-pubescent at the time of the rape.

She's the kid sister of eleven older brothers. Even if Dinah isn't a child, her brothers think of her as one.

The prince of the land rapes her, and her brothers are about to go nuclear over it.

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Shechem is a spoiled brat. He takes what he wants and expects someone else to fix anything that goes wrong. He has absolutely no sense of remorse. His type raises some difficult questions. Would forgiving someone like this just be enabling? How do we balance justice with grace?

There are no easy answers. Some folks have glorified God magnificently through simple forgiveness.

Praise the Lord for giving them the faith and the strength.

4 Genesis 34:13–29 (NIV)

*Because their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob’s sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Hamor. They said to them, “We can’t do such a thing; we can’t give our sister to a man who is not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us. We will enter into an agreement with you on one condition only: that you become like us by circumcising all your males. Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We’ll settle among you and become one people with you. But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we’ll take our sister and go.”*

*Their proposal seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem. The young man, who was the most honored of all his father’s family, lost no time in doing what they said, because he was delighted with Jacob’s daughter. So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city to speak to the men of their city. “These men are friendly toward us,” they said. “Let them live in our land and trade in it; the land has plenty of room for them. We can marry their daughters and they can marry ours. But the men will agree to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised, as they themselves are. Won’t their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us agree to their terms, and they will settle among us.”*

*All the men who went out of the city gate agreed with Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male in the city was circumcised.*

*Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob’s sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem’s house and left. The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled. They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses.*

This passage should be read with the Mission Impossible theme played in the background. (“*As always, the secretary will disavow any knowledge of your actions.*”) The brothers hatch a plan to wipe out the whole town. To keep the mission secret, they don’t let Jacob in on it. They’ve seen his timid behavior too many times.

The men of the town should have strung up their spoiled brat prince for this despicable act. But they’re such a bunch of sycophants that not only do they not punish him, they enable his behavior, even to the point of all getting circumcised.

That’s exactly what the brothers need for their plan to work. They wait until every man in the town is bed-ridden in pain, and then put them all to the sword.

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This is an act of war. It may seem extreme, but it’s nothing compared to the Trojan War, and that was started over a woman too. It all seems so senseless, but we’ll soon see the purpose of this “mini war.”

It will precipitate a crisis that will move Jacob to greater maturity.

5 Genesis 34:30–35:8 (ESV)

*Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. My numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household.” But they said, “Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?”*

*God said to Jacob, “Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.” So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.” So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem.*

*And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, and there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother. And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So he called its name Allon-bacuth.*

What foreign gods? Is it possible that Jacob's household has lots of foreign gods? Including the ones Rachel stole? And he has known about them all along? And tolerated it until now? That all seems inescapable. What, then, precipitated this sudden change in attitude?

Let's review the sequence of events. In the preceding passage, Dinah's brothers wipe out all the men in Succoth. Jacob announces that this massacre makes them *persona non-grata*, and they may be attacked. God then tells Jacob to go to Bethel and to build an altar there. Then Jacob tells his family to clean house, removing all foreign gods. He also tells them to purify themselves and to change their clothes.

His next sentence ties this all together. “*Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress.*” Finally, Jacob gets it. His distress is so great that when God responds, he's genuinely converted. He has seen the light. The LORD isn't one deity among many; He's the only one. The other gods are trash to be tossed out.

And this works. Instead of being attacked, Jacob and his family are feared and left alone.

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Faith often has a curious dynamic. You think you believe only to discover later that you have grown and your former faith looks insignificant in retrospect. Great trials do this.

Of course, the growth validates the faith. Christians never stop growing and God never stops pushing us to the next level. Trials are often how He does this. Trials give context to God's actions and make Him hard to deny. Weak faith is really partial denial. When denial becomes impossible, faith crystallizes.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Do you struggle with accepting complete forgiveness from God?
2. Have you ever wondered if you missed your calling?
3. What things should not be forgiven? (By people, the Bible says what things aren't forgiven by God.)
4. When is war just?
5. Was there a post-conversion event that crystalized your faith?