

Genesis 34

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[0 : 00] Over these past few weeks, we've been making our way through Genesis, but doing so by homing in on women who appear and who have a part to play in the account.

And this evening we come to chapter 34 and the account of Dinah and the Shechemites. Dinah was the daughter of Jacob and Leah.

And chapter 4 recounts the horrific experience that she endured and the consequences of it. And what I want to do this evening is I want to read the chapter, not a particularly long chapter.

I just want to read the whole chapter. And while I would normally encourage you to follow the reading in the Bible, on this occasion you might want to just listen as I read. It is a story.

It's not a pleasant story. It's a very horrible story. But it is a story. And so perhaps just listening to it being read will help you to get a sense of what is going on.

[1 : 15] And as I read, what I want you to do is this. I want you to try and find something good in the story. Something pure.

Something lovely. Something worthy of praise. Just something. See if you can find anything that could be described in the way that I just have described.

So let me read then the story of Dinah and Shechem. Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had born to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land.

When Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and raped her. His heart was drawn to Dinah, daughter of Jacob.

He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. And Shechem said to his wife, Hamor, get me this girl as my wife. When Jacob heard that his daughter Dinah had been defiled, his sons were in the fields with his livestock.

[2 : 20] So he did nothing about it until they came home. Then Shechem's father, Hamor, went out to talk with Jacob. Meanwhile, Jacob's sons had come in from the fields.

As soon as they heard what had happened, they were shocked and furious. Because Shechem had done an outrageous thing in Israel by sleeping with Jacob's daughter, a thing that should not be done.

But Hamor said to them, Then Shechem said to Dinah's father and brothers, Then Shechem said to Dinah's father and brothers, Let me find favor in your eyes, and I will give you whatever you ask.

Make the price for the bride and the gift I am to bring as great as you like, and I'll pay whatever you ask me. Only give me the young woman as my wife.

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.

[3 : 37] 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 will settle among you and become one people with you. But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we will take our sister and go.

The 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 towards 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.

[4 : 41] 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.

Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, You have brought trouble on me by making me obnoxious to the Canaanites and Parasites, the people living in this land.

[5 : 52] We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed. But they replied, Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?

The Word of God. Well, did you find anything? Anything at all? Anything good? Anything pure? Anything worthy?

Anything at all? This is a story, sadly a true story, that is dark and depressing and depraved from beginning to end.

If Quentin Tarantino was offered the script to it, he would turn it down as too dark and too bloodthirsty and too brutal. Well, bear with me as I pose a provocative and foolish question. What is this story doing in the Bible? What does it add to the glorious, grace-filled, big story of redemption?

[7 : 04] What does it tell us about God's love and grace? It would be no great loss, would it not, if it was dropped from the canon and we were left with 49 chapters in Genesis.

That would be enough, surely. One less chapter. What would we lose? But it is in the Bible, and it is in the Bible for a reason.

And I want to grapple with the story as we try and identify what that reason might be. I want to grapple with the story from three angles captured by three headings. The first heading is Welcome to Your World.

The next one, much more briefly, is What's Going On? And then finally, again, more briefly, There Is Hope. So the first heading as we try and consider this story is Welcome to Your World.

Dinah's world is not so different to your world. It's not so different to our world. It's a broken world. It's a violent world.

[8 : 14] It's a cynical and self-serving world. That was the world in the day of Dinah, and it's the world today. Welcome to your world.

Let's go to the story and identify some of the lowlights. Let's call them lowlights. We can't really call them highlights. Some of the lowlights of this story and draw some parallels.

What kind of world is this world that we read of? Well, the first thing that strikes us is that it's a world of sexual violence. The chapter begins, the account begins with this assault, this rape of Dinah. We read that Dinah, the daughter Leah, had born to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land when Shechem's son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her, and raped her.

Dinah was brutally raped. Is there any other kind of rape? And as the Bible states, even the language that it uses is so cold, though accurate.

[9 : 22] He saw her, he took her, and he raped her. It's cold, brutal, cruel. We live in a world of sexual violence where the victims are largely women, women like Dinah.

Men still see, take, and rape. All the time. In shanty towns and in mansions, in back streets and in living rooms, men see, take, and rape.

Rape, as we were praying, is a weapon of war used as a strategy for domination. Our cities, or many of our cities, thankfully, I don't think all of our cities, but our cities are cursed with grooming gangs.

Or, in all of our cities and towns and villages, young men with a skin full of drink ignore the delicacies of consent and abuse their victims.

And yet often, not always, but often, we try and blame the women. Dinah suffers that fate in those who read this account. You know, we read there at the very beginning of the chapter that Dinah went out to visit the women of the land.

[10:43] And there are some not slow to say, ah, yes, of course. She went to the nightclub, she was wearing a mini dress, and hey, she had it coming. Well, it's not so different to the voices we sometimes hear today.

But note another contemporary parallel, and that would be the silence of Dinah. In the whole account, we have not one single word from Dinah. She is silent from start to finish. You know, we read verse 3, and we wonder if perhaps Shechem wasn't quite so bad. Because we read there, and it's almost incongruous, given what has just come before, but we read, his heart was drawn to Dinah, daughter of Jacob.

He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. And as I say, it's difficult to kind of bring together what has just been said with what is then said in that verse. But one thing I would say is that there's no mention of Dinah speaking tenderly back to Shechem.

Did she do so? In some ways, it's irrelevant. She's a woman. She has no voice. Welcome to your world, a world of sexual violence.

[12:01] But it's a world also where young and old demand what they want. Look at Shechem there in verse 4. And Shechem said to his father Hamor, Get me this girl.

Get me this girl. I want, is the loudest cry. It was then, and it remains so today. Whatever it takes, get me what I want.

And again, I pose the question, and I'll be posing this kind of question time and time again. Is it so different today? Welcome to your world. It's a world where good men are guiltily silent.

Jacob, for all his failings, was a good man. But what do we read of Jacob? How does he perform in the face of the rape of his own daughter?

We read in verse 5, when Jacob heard that his daughter Dinah had been defiled. His sons were in the field with his livestock. So he did nothing about it until they came home.

[13:10] Now you might say it's a bit harsh to take those words, he did nothing, and say, oh, he did nothing, you know, given that it's qualified. He did nothing until they came home. But actually, when you read the whole chapter, what did he do for Dinah?

How did he protect her? How did he seek to vindicate her? Do we find him defending her honor? Do we find him seeking justice? Against the one who had committed this atrocity?

We find nothing of that. He knew that what had been done was shameful, but he does nothing. He is guiltily silent.

And so often, that's the way it is. It's best just to remain silent. Poor Dinah. She'll get over it. See, Jacob weighs up his personal interests with Dinah's right to justice, and the scale weighs down on the side of his own personal interests and convenience.

And we'll find that and meet that again in a few moments. This is a world where good men are often silent when they ought to speak out.

[14:20] Welcome to your world. It's a world where money is king. You see, this poor woman, this poor young girl has been raped, and now there's a negotiation, a negotiation to determine the bride price.

and it's all about the money. The negotiations are all about wealth and land and trade. Dinah is a pawn in a game where the kings call the shots.

Is that so different to our world? Welcome to your world. It's a world of cruel cynicism and where justice is sold to the highest bidder.

Notice in verse 11 as the negotiations continue, we read, Then Shechem, so the young man who was guilty of the rape, then Shechem said to Dinah's father and brothers, Let me find favor in your eyes and I will give you whatever you ask.

Make the price. Let me find favor in your eyes. Oh yes, I raped your daughter but get over it and let me find favor in your eyes.

[15:38] The audacity of seeking favor in the eyes of the father of the one who he had raped. The cynicism of it. But then Shechem works out that he can buy his pardon.

He can buy justice. He has the money. He has the resources. And so he says very proudly, make the price. I can pay it.

I can pay it. I can buy my way out of this. I can buy my pardon. I can buy my freedom. I can buy my immunity with the money and the wealth that I enjoy.

Does that sound familiar? Welcome to your world. For this world that we read of in this chapter it's a world also of deceit and sacrilege.

The negotiations are continuing but as we've read the brothers of Dinah are not negotiating in good faith. They have a plan that they are concocting to secure revenge against Shechem and the Shechemites.

[16:55] And so we're told that they spoke deceitfully to the Shechemites. There in verse 13 because their sister Dinah had been defiled Jacob's sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father.

The brothers grounded or rather the brothers concocted a plan grounded in deceit and here of course there's a bitter irony.

The very first time in Genesis where we have that verb used to act deceitfully it is used of course of Jacob like father like sons. But not only are they deceitful in their dealings with Shechem they're also guilty of sacrilege.

Notice how they used circumcision. Now circumcision was a holy sign of the covenant. It was a sign for those who turned to and trusted in God.

It was a sign of being owned by God and the brothers the sons of Jacob they used this sign as a tool in their deceit.

[18:08] This is an act of high sacrilege of that which is holy and sacred devalued and debased and abused to secure their vengeful intentions.

This is a world of deceit and lies and duplicity and sacrilege. Welcome to your world. But it's a world where deceit breeds deceit because we've read the story what happens the sons of Jacob are trying to deceive the Shechemites but the Shechemites in turn reckon that they can deceive the sons of Jacob.

You know we're told from verse 18 onwards that the proposal seemed good to Shechem to his father and they go to the town they bring the men together and said look this is the deal this is what they're saying these are the conditions but then notice what they say towards the end as they try and persuade their fellow citizens that it's in their interest to agree to this deal.

In verse 23 they say 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.

You know when the negotiations began the Shechemites were saying you can be in our land you can trade with us you can prosper but then when they're among themselves they're saying no you see at the end of this we are the ones who will own all of this.

[19:37] So they are victims of deceit and they are guilty of deceit themselves and that's the way it is isn't it? Deceit breeds deceit. Welcome to your world.

It's a world where justice is replaced with fury and mob violence. We know what happens. The men of Shechem agree to the condition they're circumcised and incapacitated as a result of the circumcision they're lying in pain and well we know what happens.

Simeon and Levi Dinah's brothers brothers of mother and father which is presumably why they have a particular interest in vindicating or seeking revenge on those who had defiled their sister. What do they do? They're not looking for justice they're looking for revenge. They're furious they're angry they're bloodthirsty. What do they do?

They go into Shechem and they kill all the men. That's what they do. This is no surgical strike to target Shechem.

[20:55] If that had been the case you might have said well here there is justice. But no that's not what they do. This is blanket bombing intended to secure the greatest destruction. This is a terror attack on a whole community with no distinction between the guilty and the innocent.

And there's the looting city and fields just another way of saying everything was looted. And of course it's not just Simeon and Levi they're the ones who began the attack and the violence but then we're told that the other brothers followed.

In verse 27 it's put in this way the sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies. Well clearly it's not talking about Simeon and Levi they were the ones who had killed them. But the other brothers appear.

They follow in the wake of Simeon and Levi and participate in the looting of the city. Can you even begin to imagine the children who witnessed the slaughter of their fathers and their brothers. No understanding of what was going on but they just they saw it all in front of their very eyes as Simeon and Levi came and slaughtered one and another and another and another.

[22 : 10] A world where justice is replaced by fury and often by mob violence. Welcome to your world. It's a world where morality is replaced by pragmatism and self-interest and self-protection.

Notice what Jacob says to Simeon and Levi. There in verse 30 Jacob is raging. Jacob is angry. But why is he angry?

Is he angry because of his daughter? Is he angry because of the pain that she has endured? The rape that she has been victim of? Is that why he's angry? Well no that's not why he's angry.

Look what it says from his own mouth. Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi you have brought trouble on me. You've brought trouble on me. That's why I'm angry.

Look at the mess you've made. Look at the trouble I'm in. That's why he was angry. This isn't about morality. This isn't about right or wrong. This is about his convenience. This is about his prosperity and the threat to it by what has happened.

[23 : 22] What does he go on to say? Speaks of his fears. I and my household will be destroyed. He's interested in his own protection. Not that right would be done.

Not that justice would be done. Is that so different to the world we live in? Welcome to your world. But then one final thing we might say as we draw parallels going through this sordid story. We can say that it's a world where the wicked always find an excuse or justification. Where the guilty always find an excuse.

What did Simeon and Levi say to their father? But they replied should he have treated our sister like a prostitute? They've just massacred a whole community and they're saying we had to do it. It's okay. It was the right thing to do given what this man had done to our sister. Now, what they had done was indeed an appalling thing.

[24 : 23] But then they replied with just violence on another scale and yet they would justify themselves or seek to justify themselves.

That's not so different to our world and not only our world in which we live but our own personal world where we are guilty but we find an excuse. We find a justification.

We find a way of making evil good and good evil. Welcome to your world. Much more briefly let's just think about this at two other levels or from two other perspectives.

What's going on? What's going on? Maybe the question is rather who is missing? There's something rather striking about this passage and about the verse that immediately precedes it and the verse that immediately follows it and it seems almost inevitable that the one writing the book does so deliberately.

Notice the immediately prior verse to chapter 34. There we read the final verse of chapter 33. It's speaking about Jacob and it says there he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel.

[25 : 40] Mighty is the God of Israel. Jacob built an altar a place of worship to acknowledge the God of Israel. Well that's the verse immediately before this chapter.

What about the verse immediately following this chapter or this account? We read at the beginning of verse 35, Then God said to Jacob, Go up to Bethel and settle there and build an altar there to God.

See God's there before all of this and God's there after all of this. But in the whole account of Dinah's rape and of the bloodthirsty killing that followed as a result of it, we read nothing of God. God is never mentioned. He is absent. God has left the building. Now that's another foolish thing to say really because let's be clear, God is present and in control.

God sees and God in his time will act and will judge. But the actors in the story have removed God from the picture. So what we have here in chapter 34 is a godless world and this is what a godless world looks like.

[26 : 51] Not only a godless world but more chillingly a godless people of God. You know, the actors here, who are they? They're not some pagans. It's Jacob, the great patriarch.

It's the sons of Jacob, the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. They're the ones who are acting in the way described. Just look at them. Look at these men.

Patriarchs of the faith dripping in blood. But this is what a godless world looks like. You see it in the story of Dinah. You see it in the streets of Aberdeen.

You see it in the corridors of power in Edinburgh and London and beyond. God is missing. God is not recognized. God is not honored. God has been relegated.

He's been put to one side and this is what happens. This is what it looks like. But let's close with another question. Is there hope? Maybe we can try and answer that question by remembering the voiceless one in this story, Dinah.

[27 : 58] What did Dinah need? She needed a protector. She needed a savior. She needed a redeemer. Did her father save her?

She might reasonably have looked to her father. Did he stand up for her? He didn't. What about her brothers? Did her brothers save her?

Yes, in some bloodthirsty way they sought to satisfy their thirst for revenge. But did they save her? They didn't save her either. She needed another savior.

We all need another savior. A righteous savior. A powerful savior. A loving savior. Savior. We need another savior. Who is this savior that we need?

This brutal story about Dinah is only referred to again in Genesis and indeed in the Bible in chapter 49. Let's just turn to chapter 49 of Genesis and see how this story is made reference to.

[29 : 00] And as we do, begin to identify this other savior that we need. That this broken world needs. In chapter 49, we read there at the beginning of the chapter, then Jacob called for his sons and said, gather round so that I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come.

And Jacob speaks to his sons. He is about to die. This is a parting, I don't know if you'd call it a blessing, but certainly a parting word for each of his sons.

Some of it's in the form of blessing, other less so, as we'll note. The interesting thing that is that in verses 57, Simeon and Levi are mentioned by name and the reference that is made by Jacob is to what they had done to the Shechemites.

We read there in verse 5 of chapter 49, Simeon and Levi are brothers. Their swords are weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council.

Let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they please. Cursed be their anger so fierce and their fury so cruel.

[30 : 19] I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel. That's what the father says of his own sons. And he's right. He's right in what he says about them.

But then, let's read verses 8 to 10 that speak of Judah, another of the sons of Jacob. What is said of Judah? Well, we read from verse 8. Judah, your brothers will praise you.

And let's remember, Judah, no doubt, was involved. Judah didn't go in to Shechem and kill the men, but we're told the sons of Jacob followed. It's inconceivable to imagine that Jacob said, not me.

He would have been there, but notice what is said of Judah. Judah, your brothers will praise you. Your hand will be on the neck of your enemies. Your father's sons will bow down to you. You're a lion's cub, Judah.

You return from the prey, my son. Like a lion, he crouches and lies down. Like a lioness who dares to rouse him. Who dares to rouse him? But then very especially, verse 10, the scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come.

[31 : 24] And the obedience of the nation shall be his. And so in this very chapter where we read of Simeon and Levi and of the violence that they were guilty of in the account that we have read, now we read of Judah.

And it's clear that it's not just Judah that is being spoken of, but one who will come, a ruler who will come from between his feet to whom belongs this scepter, this ruler's staff.

One who will secure the obedience of the nations. And of course, we know who is the lion of the tribe of Judah. We know who the son of Judah spoken of here.

It is Jesus, Messiah Jesus, that Savior that Dinah needs, that Jacob and Jacob's sons need, that we all need.

We can't provide that redemption. We are the problem. We need another. We need a righteous Savior. We need a powerful Savior. We need a divine Savior.

[32 : 30] And of course, here we read of one who will come, who will be that Savior, the eternal Son of God, Jesus, our Savior.

Is there hope for this broken world? It is hope in the son of Judah. We live in a broken world, but we serve a living Savior. A Savior who secured justice not by killing, but by dying.

The sons of Jacob thought that they could secure justice by killing, by shedding the blood of others. Jesus came and secured justice by dying, by shedding his own blood, by his death, by his shed blood.

He satisfied the justice of God and secured forgiveness and redemption for his people. And so we turn to him as our Savior. And in our broken world, we offer him to others as their Savior, to the victims and the perpetrators, to the dinahs, and yes, even to the shekens.

This is our task. This is what God would have us do to share with others the good news of this Savior who breaks into the dark, dark world of Dinah and the dark, dark world that we live in today.

[33 : 50] Well, let us pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your work. We thank you for the manner in which we are presented with the world as it really is, in all its ugliness, in all its cruelty, in all its violence, in all its injustice.

But we thank you that you're the God who is able and willing to save, to bring justice, to rescue the oppressed, to help the helpless.

We thank you for Jesus, your Son, our Savior. We thank you for the Lion of the tribe of Judah, for that Son of Judah to whom has been given that ruler's staff.

who owns and enjoys more and more the obedience of the nations. We thank you for his sovereign rule over all and over us.

And help us to turn to him as our Savior, but help us also to offer him as the Savior in this world that is so dark and broken and cruel.

[35 : 02] And we pray in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.