

# BLOOD BROTHERS

GENESIS 34:1-31 SEPTEMBER 21, 2022

Our passage tonight is a truly shocking depiction of sin. The story is full of ruin and violence, and waste. The *most* shocking thing is how much of it is carried out by God's people.

Genesis shows what sin does to the world but also what God does to rescue us from it. It's about how God gives grace to the undeserving, uses the unworthy, and accomplishes His plan by the power of His love. But, as that work unfolds, human beings continue to sin and the horrible consequences spread around the world, impacting both the guilty and the innocent.

Reading this awful tale might make us ask, "Where was God in this tragedy?" Martin Luther did. He wrote, "*Who is on guard here? Who is keeping watch? God and the angels close their eyes and pretend not to see. God ignores the matter and acts just as if He did not know [it was happening].*"<sup>1</sup>

Was God ignoring His people? If He promised to protect them, why is the most innocent family member brutally assaulted and held hostage?

We know that God was there and, more importantly, we know that He had an unfailing love for His people. He does for us, too. When asking, "Where was God," there's one sure answer: *Not* on the minds of Jacob's family. They don't mention Him, speak to Him, or obey Him. He's totally *absent* from their thoughts, words, and actions. The result is grim.

In our last study, we saw that Jacob began to walk by faith, but after the Lord delivered him from danger, Jacob stopped short of full obedience. He was meant to go to Bethel. Instead he set up camp 20 miles away.<sup>2</sup> That's close enough, right? Chapter 34 gives the answer. We'll watch with breaking hearts the downfall of being outside the will of God.

It's not that bad things *never* happen to God's people - they do - but it becomes clear that *this* bad thing would not have happened if Jacob had *kept* walking by faith.

**Genesis 34:1-2 - Leah's daughter Dinah, whom Leah bore to Jacob, went out to see some of the young women of the area. <sup>2</sup>When Shechem—son of Hamor the Hivite, who was the region's chieftain—saw her, he took her and raped her.**

Dinah is around 15 or 16 years old.<sup>3</sup> I would like to say right up front: She is not to be blamed for what happened to her. Almost every commentary immediately criticizes her for going out of the house. Yes, they say, *Shechem* did the worse thing, but Dinah was partially at fault or acting in disobedience or impropriety. Medieval commentators are particularly harsh toward her. They insist

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<sup>1</sup> Joy A. Schroeder *The Rape of Dinah: Luther's Interpretation of a Biblical Narrative*

<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes *Genesis: Beginning And Blessing*

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

her rape was the punishment for her “curiosity,” which (they say) all women should avoid.<sup>4</sup> Going back to Luther, he uses this text as a basis for teaching that women should be like “a nail driven into the wall,” not leaving the house. He wrote, “They should not form the habit of strolling about and looking out of the window and lounging around the door.”<sup>5</sup>

Does Dinah share any blame? They had lived in this spot for years. We know women like Rachel would go out as shepheresses alone. Jacob had developed personal relationships with the people of this village. Dinah had, no doubt, made *many* trips into town. This poor girl is not at fault.

If you want to blame anyone besides this scumbag, Shechem, then blame *Jacob*. Throughout this text, we are given the impression that he was totally indifferent to the plight of his daughter. Jacob, the master shepherd, let his *most precious* lamb go in and out of the fold without help, shield, or guide. He would never let a *sheep* graze this way, but it’s as if he has no care for his little girl.

If you read commentaries on this passage, a few will try to suggest that this may *not* have been rape at all but that it was a consensual relationship. That is a needless and heartless attempt to implicate an innocent girl in this sin. It doesn’t fit the context or the language, as explained at length by resources like *The New American Commentary*.

**Genesis 34:3-4 - <sup>3</sup>He became infatuated with Jacob’s daughter Dinah. He loved the young girl and spoke tenderly to her. <sup>4</sup>“Get me this girl as a wife,” he told his father.**

Shechem is repulsive. But, *this* was normal, Canaanite behavior. It’s normal *sin* behavior. Genesis teaches us that sin is no small thing. It’s not a joke. And it pervades human culture. Shechem was living out the advice that every *Disney* movie and romantic comedy preaches: *Follow your heart!* In a few verses, Shechem’s dad will say, “His heart is set on Dinah.” But our hearts are corrupted by sin. Look what that motivated Shechem to do. Your heart is the *worst possible* thing you could follow. The Lord says, “I’m going to rescue you from all of this and the *first* thing you need is a new heart!” Shechem really did “love” Dinah, but with a sin-soaked love - one that harmed and held her hostage. To him, it was real and it was passionate and it was good. What kind of love would it have been to Dinah? Were his words tender in *her* ears?

**Genesis 34:5 - <sup>5</sup>Jacob heard that Shechem had defiled his daughter Dinah, but since his sons were with his livestock in the field, he remained silent until they returned.**

There’s no record of Jacob sending word. It seems like he didn’t want his flocks disturbed. He was *silent*. We’re not given any indication that he was even upset. We might think, “How can that be? Of *course* he was upset.” That’s possible but remember: Moses has been quick to tell us *other* times that Jacob was emotional or upset or all the times he bursts into tears.<sup>6</sup> But not here.

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<sup>4</sup> *Schroeder*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Waltke*

R. Kent Hughes contrasts Jacob in this scene with how he acts when it comes to Joseph being hurt or the mere suggestion that something might happen to Benjamin. The comparison is not pretty.

Now, on the one hand, what could he do? He's just one man, right? But what did we see in the very last passage? *As one man he stood as the defender between his family and the four hundred troops of Esau. Then he was walking by faith.* But now, for some years, he has been indifferent to the Lord, and that indifference has influenced him profoundly.

**Genesis 34:6-7 - <sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, Shechem's father Hamor came to speak with Jacob. <sup>7</sup> Jacob's sons returned from the field when they heard about the incident. They were deeply grieved and very angry, for Shechem had committed an outrage against Israel by raping Jacob's daughter, and such a thing should not be done.**

The brothers had a deep, grieving, blazing fury when they heard what had happened. Jacob is *still* silent and indifferent. For Jacob, this was about being *outnumbered*. For the brothers, it was an *outrage*. When Shechem and Hamor come to negotiate, the brothers arrive and take over the situation. Jacob, in his indifference, is sidelined.

**Genesis 34:8-10 - <sup>8</sup> Hamor said to Jacob's sons, "My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife. <sup>9</sup> Intermarry with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. <sup>10</sup> Live with us. The land is before you. Settle here, move about, and acquire property in it."**

Hamor thinks he has a lot to offer. But did you notice that he only offers things that God had *already promised* to Jacob? God had already promised them offspring and the land and abundance in it. In fact, God had guaranteed much more.

This is what the world does. It comes and whispers to us about all the things it can offer. It offers you pleasure. It offers you purpose. It offers you power and position. But everything it offers comes at a brutal price and what it delivers can't compare to what the Lord wants to give. The pleasure of sin is fleeting and rancid. The Lord's joy is forevermore. The purpose the world offers you is built on things that have no eternal value. It's like the grass of the field. But the purpose the Lord gives makes us shine like stars forever and ever.<sup>7</sup> The power and position the world holds out are not theirs to give. Compare that to what God promises through Paul in Ephesians 1:

**Ephesians 1:18-19 - <sup>18</sup> I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength.**

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel 12:3

The world has *nothing* to offer you that can last forever. And all its offers come at a brutal price. Look at what Hamor and Shechem did to Dinah. And then consider that, at that very moment, she was being held hostage in Shechem's home. We learn that in verses 17 and 26.

I can see why Hamor made this offer. Jacob signaled that this was what he wanted. He spent years cozying up to these Canaanites like Lot had with Sodom. Throughout the scene, Jacob remains silent. They got all these signals, so Hamor says, "live with us." The word can mean "remain sitting down."<sup>8</sup> It's telling that the first thing God says to Jacob is, "Get up, go to Bethel and settle *there*."

**Genesis 34:11-12 - <sup>11</sup>Then Shechem said to Dinah's father and brothers, "Grant me this favor, and I'll give you whatever you say. <sup>12</sup>Demand of me a high compensation and gift; I'll give you whatever you ask me. Just give the girl to be my wife!"**

Now Shechem wants to do things honorably. He has no fixed morality - only desire. The Canaanites show us how different the life of faith is meant to be. Your life isn't meant to be lived from one impulse to the next, with your desires ruling your thoughts and choices. We're to be anchored to the truth of God, building our lives on it, and allowing it to conform us into the image of Christ.

**Genesis 34:13-17 - <sup>13</sup>But Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully because he had defiled their sister Dinah. <sup>14</sup>"We cannot do this thing," they said to them. "Giving our sister to an uncircumcised man is a disgrace to us. <sup>15</sup>We will agree with you only on this condition: if all your males are circumcised as we are. <sup>16</sup>Then we will give you our daughters, take your daughters for ourselves, live with you, and become one people. <sup>17</sup>But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and go."**

It is astonishing to realize that Jacob himself signed off on this plan. You see, he *also* didn't know what the brothers were planning to do. He, too, was deceived. And like Hamor, he goes along with it. Look at what his indifference is doing. It left his precious daughter unprotected. It blinded his heart to right and wrong. And now, his indifference has just signed off on a plan that would be the *end* of the chosen people. The Canaanites *immediately* recognize that they will simply absorb this Hebrew family and they'll be gone forever. But Jacob agrees to this plan. It's a spiritual tragedy.

The story pivots to focus on the brothers, who are *also* part of the downfall of living outside the will of God. In Jacob, we see incredible indifference. In the brothers we see ruthless destruction. Their anger started out righteous, but their methods were completely outside God's boundaries.

First, they start by deceiving. Second, their plan uses their sister as bait, exposing her to more abuse. The brother's plan to "help" her would leave her captive for several more days, being subjected to unspeakable harm and fear. Third, their methods were sacrilegious.<sup>9</sup> They took something Godly and perverted it so it could be used as a weapon. This is *not* how God's people are supposed to contend with the enemy.

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<sup>8</sup> NASB Dictionary

<sup>9</sup> Waltke

They said, "Do this or we will take our daughter and go." That's *exactly* what they should have done. But none of them were walking by faith. In fact, we'll learn that Jacob's family had become pagan idolaters. And so, in this terrible trial, they are not bearing the fruit of love but of sin and violence.

**Genesis 34:18-20** - <sup>18</sup> **Their words seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem. <sup>19</sup> The young man did not delay doing this, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most important in all his father's family. <sup>20</sup> So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city.**

Archaeology indicates the town wouldn't have been a *major* city, but it was large enough to have a wall and gates. There the men of fighting age gathered to discuss the plan. Shechem was their prince and had a lot of influence. He's designated a "young man" here and leads them all to their doom. There's a subtle warning about the dangers of putting youth in charge. Shechem isn't wise, even by the world's standards. He has no concern *other* than him getting Dinah.

**Genesis 34:21-24** - <sup>21</sup> **"These men are peaceful toward us," they said. "Let them live in our land and move about in it, for indeed, the region is large enough for them. Let's take their daughters as our wives and give our daughters to them. <sup>22</sup> But the men will agree to live with us and be one people only on this condition: if all our men are circumcised as they are. <sup>23</sup> Won't their livestock, their possessions, and all their animals become ours? Only let's agree with them, and they will live with us." <sup>24</sup> All the men who had come to the city gates listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and all those men were circumcised.**

Their end goal was not just to take Dinah but to take *everything* from Jacob and his family. Remember all those promises of power and possessions and freedom? It was a lie - a ruse so that their enemies could bleed them dry. That's what sin wants to do to you. Don't take the bait.

The name Hamor means "male donkey."<sup>10</sup> He had invited Jacob to dwell with them, to enjoy all the pleasures they could offer. If they did, they'd be swallowed up. It reminds me of the old *Pinocchio* cartoon when the boys rush off to Pleasure Island, only to become donkeys, enslaved forever.

**Genesis 34:25-29** - <sup>25</sup> **On the third day, when they were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords, went into the unsuspecting city, and killed every male. <sup>26</sup> They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with their swords, took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went away. <sup>27</sup> Jacob's sons came to the slaughter and plundered the city because their sister had been defiled. <sup>28</sup> They took their flocks, herds, donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. <sup>29</sup> They captured all their possessions, dependents, and wives and plundered everything in the houses.**

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<sup>10</sup> H.E. Ryle *The Book Of Genesis*

Simeon and Levi were full brothers of Dinah. So were Reuben, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun but we aren't told why they weren't involved in the mass murder. And that's what this was. It would've been a prolonged, savage undertaking. We've never known carnage like this.

*This is not justice.* They butchered many innocent people. But revenge had taken hold of their hearts like indifference had taken hold of Jacob's, and the result was maybe the worst act of sin this book has recorded, carried out by the family of faith. We are not immune from sin. We're *rescued* from it, but if we think sin is only a problem for the pagans, we need to pay attention. God's people are just as able to bring ruin and destruction to this world when we're not walking with the Lord.

If the slaughter wasn't bad enough, we see it was followed up by the plundering of the city. The text isn't specific, but it would seem that while the two brothers did the killing, the rest did the stealing.<sup>11</sup> It makes us wonder: Was Joseph part of the raiding party, too?

Let's notice one more thing about this appalling deed: They took the wives and children from all these houses. So, in the end, they effectively are doing what Shechem did. But, they hide that sin behind a phony veil of religion. "We're so offended at this unrighteous act that we have to turn around and do the same thing many times over to you!"

Compare the murderous spree of Levi, who claimed to be motivated by righteous anger, to Levi's descendant Phinehas, who *really* was motivated by righteous anger and slew two people who were in open sin, mocking God, and bringing judgment on the nation. He executed them and no one else. That's not what's happening in *this* chapter. This is not justice. It is not righteous. They could not appeal to heaven's morality because they had utterly violated it themselves.

There are things done under the banner of faith that have nothing to do with the truth. Sometimes people say, "Well, Christianity had the crusades," as if that proves God doesn't exist. The crusades had nothing to do with genuine Christianity any more than this vicious mass murder did. Today, prominent Christians will commit acts of sin and will expect to get a pass on it because of who they are. But that's not how truth works. That's not how holiness works. God expects real faith from us.

Finally, Jacob speaks. Let's see what he has to say.

**Genesis 34:30-31** - <sup>30</sup>Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me, making me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. We are few in number; if they unite against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed." <sup>31</sup>But they answered, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?"

Earlier, Jacob showed no emotion. Now he's all worked up. Did you notice that Jacob doesn't talk about his daughter? He says, "they're going to attack *me* and *I* and *my household* will be destroyed!" Where is the Jacob of chapter 33? That guy is nowhere to be found.

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<sup>11</sup> *ESV Study Bible Notes*

It's interesting, the Lord renamed him "Israel" in chapter 32 which signaled the beginning of something wonderful. But after that great scene, Jacob stopped pursuing the Lord. He settled where he didn't belong. He's not Israel in chapter 34, he's *Jacob* again. Once he returns to the Lord in chapter 35, the Lord will *again* rename him Israel. Jacob took two steps forward, one step back, but the Lord was still with him. This period of his life was a mistake - a very painful mistake - but God did not give up on Jacob. His mercy is new every morning.

As the chapter closes, we see a great divide in this family. The boys *defy* their father.<sup>12</sup> They openly rebuke him. There is no resolution to their argument. The account just *ends*. Jacob, it seems, resented these two sons till the day he died,<sup>13</sup> and we'll see that the consequences of these spiritual missteps continue to impact the family in terrible ways.

Jacob worried about how "few" they were. But he should know by now it didn't matter how few they were. If the Lord was for them, who could be against them?

Sin is a scary thing. Being outside of the will of God is a dangerous thing. This is why God has intervened to save us and draw us to Himself. He placed no barriers between Jacob and Bethel. It was *Jacob* who stopped short for commercial, strategic reasons. But this delay proves what Proverbs says more than once to us: "There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death."<sup>14</sup>

I don't mean to suggest that as long as you follow God no one in your family will ever suffer or be hurt. Following God does not shield us from every attack. Bad things happen to God's people even when they're right where the Lord wants them to be. But this terrible story should remind us of how dangerous sin is in the culture around us and how dangerous it is when left to operate in our own hearts. And we see here how dangerous it is for us and those we love to be living life outside the will of God. We don't need to live in fear of failure - just live in the fear of the Lord. "How happy is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways!" "the Lord keeps his eye on those who fear him— those who depend on his faithful love to rescue them from death."

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<sup>12</sup> *New American Commentary*

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 49:5-7

<sup>14</sup> Proverbs 14:12, 16:25