

GENESIS

33:1-34:31

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Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 21st April 2024 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Ephesians 4:25-5:2

Introduction

Last Sunday morning we studied chapter 33 where we saw Jacob set off for the Land of Canaan, having parted ways with his uncle Laban forever. But ahead of him was uncertainty — for he was now returning to see his brother, who, the last time he saw him some 20 years before, wanted to kill him for having deceived their father, Isaac, out of the birthright that ordinarily would have gone to Esau as the firstborn of these twins.

So Jacob sends messengers to Esau, with a message of peace, but as the messengers returned all they shared with Jacob was that Esau was now coming to meet him too — along with 400 men. And so Jacob went into panic mode, assuming the worst, that Esau was still furious with him. And he prepared wave after wave of gifts for him, in an attempt to appease him.

But while Jacob feared he might be finished, God *wasn't* finished with him, and we *read* of how he encountered God in physical form, as He wrestled with Jacob, for He wanted to change his heart. And this was reflected in the new name God gave him. No longer would he be called Jacob (meaning *supplanter*), but Israel (meaning *governed by God*). But as we'll see today, Jacob still had much to learn, as indeed we do.

This morning then, we'll study chapter 33, but also chapter 34. And if last week's letter of the day was the letter P, then this morning's letter is the letter R. And it won't *all* be happy news.

Overview of chapter thirty three

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- **v1-17** — Jacob & Esau **reunited**
- **v18-20** — Jacob **returns** to Canaan

The events of chapter 33 would have brought much relief to Jacob, as we'll see he was reunited peacefully with his twin brother, Esau. Following which, he returns to the Land of Canaan. However, he neither settles in the same place as Esau, nor immediately visits his father, Isaac, who is still alive. Instead, he makes camp at a place called Succoth, before moving onto a place called Shechem, a city of the same name as the son of the possessor and leader of that place (a man called Hamor). And it is here that the events of chapter 34 take place.

Overview of chapter thirty four

Now, chapter 34 itself is a good reminder that sometimes the things we worry about, that we have no control over, actually come to nothing — such as how Jacob was worried about meeting Esau. But the things we *do* have control or at least a high degree of influence over are the things we *ought* to be *more* concerned about, and more careful or prudent in.

Overview of chapter thirty four

- **v1-4** — Rape
- **v5-10** — Reaction
- **v11-24** — Requirements
- **v25-31** — Revenge

For in the opening 4 verses, we see a terrible event take place involving Jacob's only daughter, Dinah. That is followed in verses 5-10 by her brother's reaction to what had taken place, and the subsequent requirements they throw at the people of Shechem (in verses 11-24), before they unwisely take their revenge in the final 7 verses of this chapter. By the end of this chapter we'll see a mighty strain placed on this family unit.

Chapter thirty three

First, though, let's pick up the account of what happened at the start of chapter 33, where Jacob is travelling towards his brother, Esau, knowing he was coming toward him also.

Genesis 33:1-2

Now Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and there, Esau was coming, and with him were four hundred men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maidservants. And he put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph last.

It seems then, that Jacob was still nervous about this. He still doesn't know what his brother is thinking or feeling, or what his intent is. And so he divides his family up, and frankly speaking, he puts his favourite wife and favourite son at the lowest risk, putting them last out of these groups. I'm not saying that it's good or right to have favourites, but rather that's what he did.

Genesis 33:3

Then he crossed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

That is, Jacob goes first — partly practical, for it was his brother after all. But also I believe he is showing the protective responsibility that a husband and father should for his family. And this is something to be encouraged, especially in our day. For, today, it is suggested that there should be no difference between a man and a woman, nor their responsibilities, but that is not only poor logic, but contrary to what the Bible teaches.

For, husbands, we are told to lay down our lives for our wives, just as Christ did the church. That is in physical protection — keeping them from harm. That is in labour — willingly providing for them and our families. That is in presence — being there with them, not hiding in the pub or the man cave. And that is in spiritual leadership — doing all we can to encourage them in their walk with the Lord, noting what we read in Ephesians chapter 5:

Ephesians 5:25-27

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Here, if anyone is going to be attacked by Esau first, it will be Jacob. But continuing to try and appease his brother who he believes is still and angry and intent on killing him, Jacob shows much humility, bowing himself repeatedly as they drew closer.

Genesis 33:4

But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

What a different encounter to what Jacob was bracing himself for! Evidently, Esau, since he last saw Jacob, had had quite the change of heart from what we *read* in chapter 27 when he said in his heart "I will kill my brother Jacob". And it's really quite a beautiful picture this creates as these brothers embrace in peace, after more than 20 years apart, with no grudge in sight.

Genesis 33:5

And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, "Who are these with you?" So he said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant."

So as they gathered themselves, wiping away the tears of joy, Esau looks up and asks who all these people are that are standing nearby. And Jacob, introduces his wives, maidservants, and Esau's 11 nephews and niece that he knew nothing of until now. We read:

Genesis 33:6-7

Then the maidservants came near, they and their children, and bowed down. And Leah also came near with her children, and they bowed down. Afterward Joseph and Rachel came near, and they bowed down.

Perhaps nervous themselves of what Esau and his 400 men with him intended — or at least instructed in advance by Jacob — Leah, Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah and their children, each bow down as they come closer. But this is a happy scene. “Hey kids, this uncle Esau.” says Jacob. “Wow, he’s hairy!” you can picture one of the little ones saying.

Genesis 33:8

Then Esau said, “What do you mean by all this company which I met?” And he said, “These are to find favour in the sight of my lord.”

So, Esau is asking about the presents Jacob had sent ahead — that is, the herds of animals Jacob had sent in wave after wave (again, some £200,000 at today’s values by one estimate). And Jacob is honest — they were as much for his benefit, as Esau’s, for he was trying to appease him. To find favour with a man he though wanted to kill him. But Esau had shown grace — there was no demand for anything from Jacob:

Genesis 33:9

But Esau said, “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.”

While Esau would ever more be known as one who married the daughters of foreign gods, who despised his birthright, and described in Hebrews as both a fornicator and profane, here at least, there is an incredible show of maturity.

There’s no greed, no envy. Only contentment, and it seems, forgiveness. For he’s saying “*you don’t owe me anything, Jacob*”. Indeed, we’ll even see him offer to leave servants to accompany Jacob in his travels in a few verses time. What a beautiful thing reconciliation is!

The question we should challenge ourselves with, then, is *would we have acted that way?* Would we have been as content as Esau with what we already had, or thought “*you know what, he cheated me out of my birthright, so I’ll take everything I can from him!*”. Or perhaps “*he jolly well ought to be nice to me after what he did!*”. Would we have failed to forgive, and instead hold a grudge? Would we have been bitter?

The real challenge, though, is not how you or I *might* have acted toward *Jacob*, but how *have* we acted, and how *are* we acting towards others we know *today*? For there is no occasion where a Christian should hold a grudge. None whatsoever. There should be nothing that causes you to treat another person poorly because of how they acted in the past. There is nothing that should prevent you from fellowshiping with other believers — remember, you’re going to spend eternity with them!

Let me put it plainly — Christian maturity requires you to put aside any grudges, bitterness or hate. You cannot say “*Oh, I’m not going to talk with that person any more*”, or “*I’m not going to reply to their messages*”. You should not be walking away from a group conversation the moment they enter it, or worse, leave the room the moment they enter it. Remember — Christ died for their sin, and your sin. You should forgive others, as He forgave *you*. Scripture is clear on this matter. We read in Leviticus:

Leviticus 19:17-18

You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbour, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.

So, there is time for correction — that's very necessary in fact — but you are not to hate, you are not to grudge. Rather, you are to love. But lest you think this was only somehow required under the law, look again at what we read in Ephesians:

Ephesians 4:31-5:2

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

If Christ forgave *you* for all your sin against Him, and you're going to *imitate* Him, then you ought to forgive all those who have sinned against *you*. There is no room for pettiness. No room for bitterness. Hebrews 12 is also clear on this:

Hebrews 12:14-15

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

Bitterness will cause you trouble. It will cause others trouble. And it will cause this church trouble. So we must all keep from it. And note, even when you're not the one who has been offended or hurt, you are to forgive. You are not to hold grudges, for they are destructive.

In case you needed any more clarity on this matter, consider the words Jesus Himself said:

Mark 11:25-26

"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

"*Oh, but I don't know how I can let this thing drop*", you might say or think. Well, there is help for that. Again, remember what else we read in Hebrews:

Hebrews 4:14-16

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Being a Christian doesn't mean that temptation to hold a grudge or be bitter won't occur. And it doesn't mean we'll find it easy to forgive. But we must. Indeed, if a man of Esau's character, who was a model or type of the flesh, managed to forgive, so must we, remembering how we have been forgiven ourselves by God.

Now, Esau had said *"I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself."* But Jacob is insistent:

Genesis 33:10-11

And Jacob said, "No, please, if I have now found favour in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me. Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough." So he urged him, and he took it.

Was this a guilty conscience on Jacob's part? Perhaps. But when we look carefully at this verse, we see this is now in *response* to the grace Esau had shown. This mirrors our relationship to God in some ways, for initially Jacob was trying to earn Esau's favour, because of the wrong he had done. But Esau showed grace, and now Jacob was no longer trying to earn his favour, but show gratitude for what had already been shown.

And that's where we are — indeed, we can never earn God's grace (or it wouldn't be grace!), but having received it, we are to give our best to him out of a thankful heart. And furthermore, we see that Jacob gives to Esau out of what *God* had graciously given him. That is, Jacob was very aware that the blessings in his hand were not because of his own work. Even though he had worked hard. So it is with us, that we're not the masters of our own success as much as we like to think we are.

Now, reunited and reconciled, we now see these brothers return to where they will settle and live:

Genesis 33:12-14

Then Esau said, "Let us take our journey; let us go, and I will go before you." But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are weak, and the flocks and herds which are nursing are with me. And if the men should drive them hard one day, all the flock will die. Please let my lord go on ahead before his servant. I will lead on slowly at a pace which the livestock that go before me, and the children, are able to endure, until I come to my lord in Seir."

So, Esau has said *"let's go home, Jacob — follow me"*. But Jacob makes a reasonable suggestion, given Esau's 400 men will no doubt be able to travel much faster than many herds and ferrying a dozen children. Anyone who's ever tried to get a child ready to travel somewhere will appreciate that! But there's quite possibly more underlying this too, for Esau lived in Seir, in Edom. And that's not the land that God had told Jacob to return to. And indeed, Jacob never settled there.

But Esau, it seems, is happy to have his brother back:

Genesis 33:15

And Esau said, "Now let me leave with you some of the people who are with me." But he said, "What need is there? Let me find favour in the sight of my lord."

Esau is wanting to protect Jacob, it seems. But Jacob is really self-sufficient in a good way, because of all God had blessed him with. Remember he had servants too.

Genesis 33:16-17

So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, built himself a house, and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

And so, all seems well. God had warned *Laban* not to harm Jacob, and *Esau* had met him with warmth, and not war. But in this good moment, this moment of ease, Jacob makes what seem like simple practical decisions, yet they will turn out to be ones that have both immediate and lasting consequences. And there's going to be real warning for us in what comes next. For our choices have consequences too, of course.

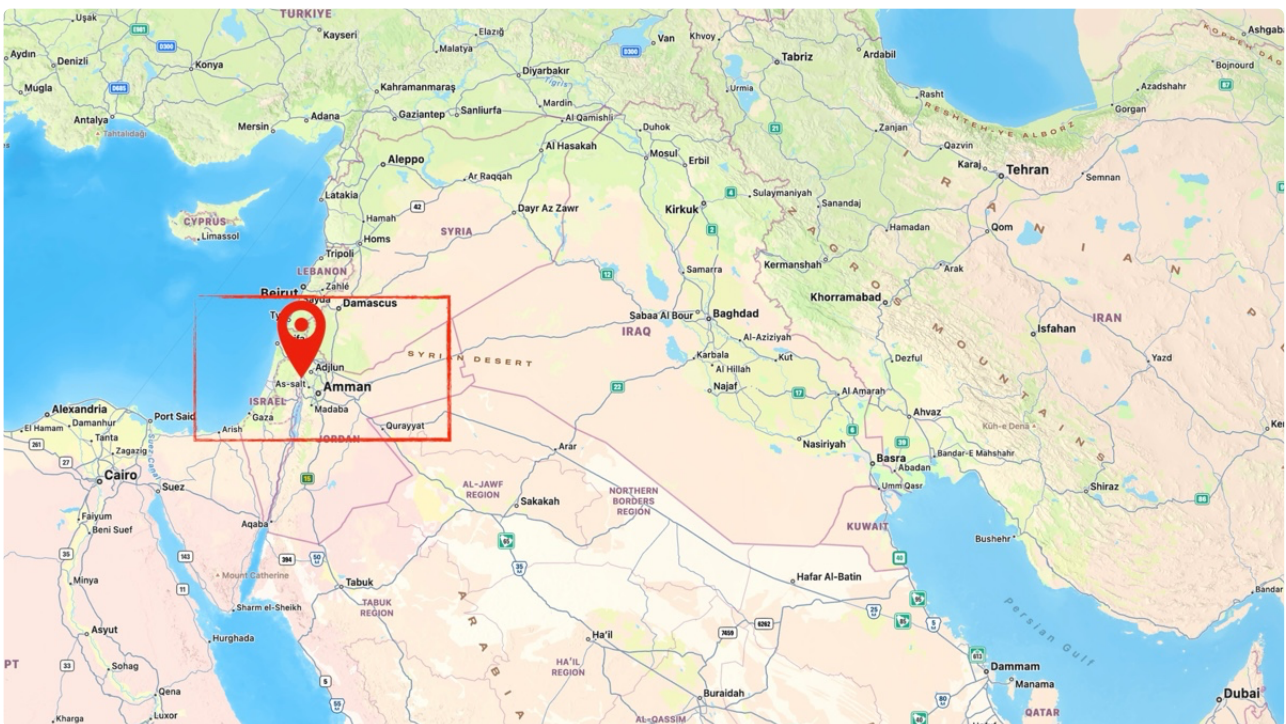
And first, we see Jacob pauses in this place called Succoth, not to be confused with other places called Succoth in the Bible — such as the one in Egypt. And in this place he goes as far to build himself a house, though at least a couple of Bible commentators note this was more of a temporary dwelling, even referring to the meaning of this place name as “tent town”.

And it is a temporary stop, for before long, we find he moves on:

Genesis 33:18-20

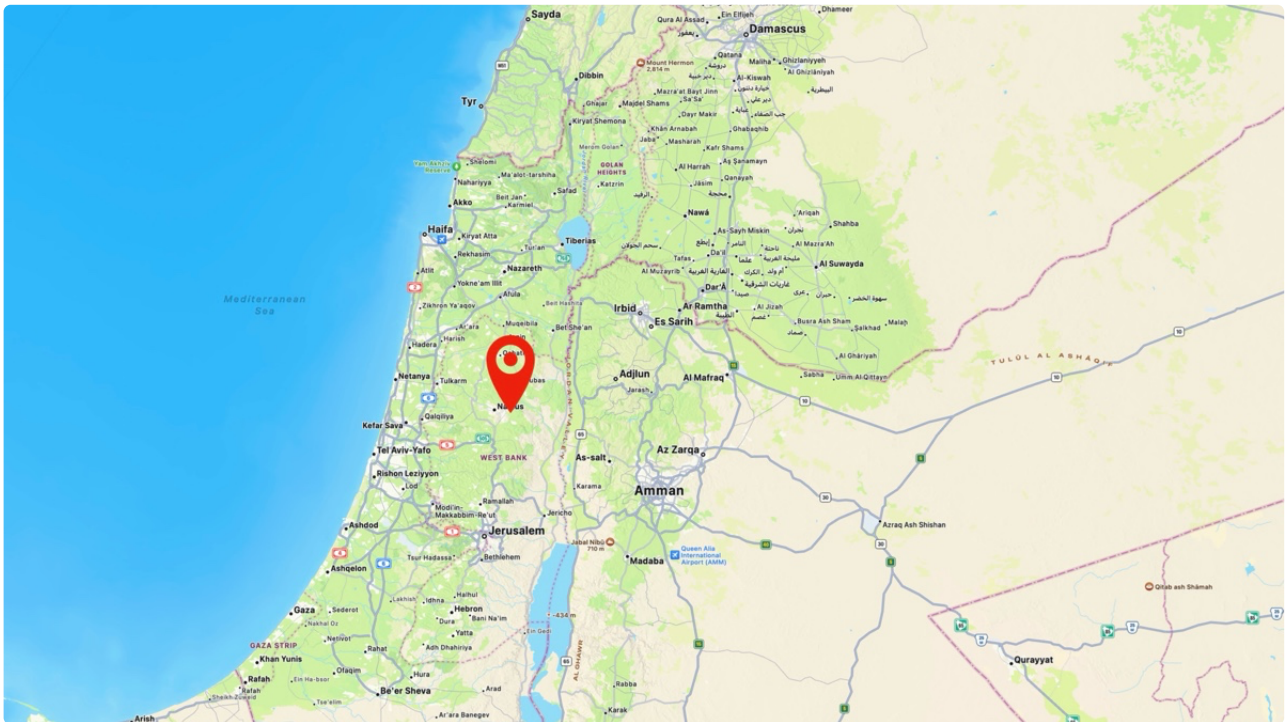
Then Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram; and he pitched his tent before the city. And he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money. Then he erected an altar there and called it El Elohe Israel.

So, Jacob settles at a place called Shechem, purchasing a piece of land from Hamor, the king of Shechem. And this land would remain in his possession for some time, for we'll later see in chapter 37 that his sons had been feeding his sheep here, with Jacob sending off Joseph to meet them here (though, as it turned out they had moved on to another place). And lest we forget that this is a factual account, not merely a story, here's where it is located:



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Zooming in a little, we can see it is yet further south of the Sea of Galilee, about half way between there and Jerusalem, just to the east of the city of Nablus in the West Bank:



© Apple Maps

And archaeological evidence of this city remains to this day, as you can see here, showing one of the gates to the ancient city:



TrickyH via Wikimedia Commons CC By-SA 4.0

And here is an aerial view of the same spot:



Dr Avishai Teicher via Wikimedia Commons

Being so ancient, this city went through many events — including what we read here in chapters 33 & 34 this morning — but it's first mention in the Bible was back in chapter 12, when Jacob's grandfather, then known as Abram, passed through this way. While here he built an altar, before moving on in the direction of Bethel. And Jacob does exactly the same, naming it El-Elohe-Israel which means, "God, the God of Israel." And this is a good thing.

But what we see in the details of verse 18 is that he "pitched his tent before the city", reminiscent of how Lot pitched his tent before Sodom. And very soon, Jacob will come to regret this decision, for having moved his family out from the influence of his uncle Laban's home, he now settles them in outside this Canaanite city, only to find things start to unravel in the space of 1 chapter.

And therein is great warning for us to think very carefully about where we live, and what influences will be on our children there. It's not that we can escape the world. It's not that we should all hide away in a commune, isolated from the world as the Amish do. But we do need to think carefully about the choices we make — and I would particularly stress that you should never move to a new area without being *sure* that there is a Bible teaching church that you go and commit to, for sadly, Bible teaching churches are harder to come by than we might think.

You see, no-one would be so reckless as to move their family to another place, without checking out if there are good schools in the area. No-one would move to an area just hoping there would be a job for you when you get there. And no sensible person would move house without getting a survey done of the new property. So don't decide to move town, county or country, without finding a Bible teaching church *first* — for that has a far greater, and eternally impactful influence on you and your family than those other things. And indeed, should your children head off to university away from home, be sure that finding a Bible teaching church is something you talk about with them *before* they leave, indeed before they decide where to go.

Chapter thirty four

Here, as already said, Jacob had moved his family from the influence of *Laban's* house, but to a place where there would be even more worldly influence on them.

And we read in chapter 34, verse 1:

Genesis 34:1

Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land.

And maybe it's not surprising that she wanted to get out from among the family, with 11 brothers! But we actually see that she was drawn to what was going on in the city (the Jewish historian, Josephus, also recording that she went to one of the festivals at Shechem).

While what happens to Dinah was not her fault, her choice to head into the city was what gave opportunity for wickedness to take place. So, we should at least remind ourselves of what Proverbs 12:26 says, that *"The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray."*

Here we see this young girl — estimated to be maybe just 14 or 15 years old at the time — head into a city of Canaanites, a people already known to be wicked. It was a poor choice.

Genesis 34:2

And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her.

That is, Shechem took her by force, he seized her, and he raped her. The first recorded rape in the Bible. A despicable act for which she was not to blame, despite her choice to have gone into this worldly and wicked city. But then we read:

Genesis 34:3

His soul was strongly attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman and spoke kindly to the young woman.

This seems quite the contrast, right? But that's the power of sexual intimacy. It fundamentally changes the relationship between a man and woman. It attaches you to someone in a way that cannot be fully described, but why one way we *try* our best to describe it is in terms of becoming one with another. It's so much more than mere physical experience. It's indescribably powerful, and why it is to be reserved for the commitment of marriage.

You only need to look at how so many in the world today end up in absolute turmoil when a relationship ends... why? It's not only the sense of loss of that relationship, or what was hoped to come out of that relationship, but it's the brokenness of having given absolutely everything of your body to that person, and the vulnerability that goes with that, that now tears you apart as that person is removed from you. That was never something God designed to be experienced, for His plan, His design, was for one man and one woman to experience that intimacy and joy within the safe boundary and confines of the lifelong commitment of marriage, that no man should separate.

It's why we read in Hebrews 13:4 that *"Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."*

Here in *this* chapter, and while it no way compares to the distress he must have placed on poor Dinah, Shechem is reeling too, and doesn't want to be without her:

Genesis 34:4

So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this young woman as a wife."

Which was how marriages were typically arranged at that time; through the parents.

Genesis 34:5

And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter. Now his sons were with his livestock in the field; so Jacob held his peace until they came.

I can't imagine what Jacob must have felt at hearing this news. While this verse says he held his peace, it certainly doesn't say he was *at* peace! But while he doesn't take matters into his own hands, perhaps learning from his past, he now arguably fails to act at all, as Shechem's dad comes to try and make the best of an awful situation. We read:

Genesis 34:6-7

Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. And the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it; and the men were grieved and very angry, because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, a thing which ought not to be done.

And Dinah's brothers were absolutely right to be *very* angry. Indeed, this is one of those abhorrent things that we should *all* be very angry about when it happens. But, though we should be angry at such wickedness (with a righteous anger), we must not sin, as we're told in Ephesians:

Ephesians 4:25-27

Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour," for we are members of one another. "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.

Paul here is quoting from Psalm 4, which says:

Psalm 4:5-5

Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, And put your trust in the LORD.

Here in Genesis, Jacob's sons exhibit none of what is commended in those verses — they let their anger fester, they failed to trust God, and we'll soon see that they lied too, using the opportunity Hamor and Shechem now present them with:

Genesis 34:8-10

But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife. And make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters to yourselves. So you shall dwell with us, and the land shall be before you. Dwell and trade in it, and acquire possessions for yourselves in it."

So, Hamor paints a happier picture future for them. But there's a massive problem here, for Abraham's descendants (who are becoming known as the children of Israel at this point) were to remain a separate and pure people, and not intermarry with the nations around them, for it would have risked the pure line through to Christ that was so essential for our salvation. In other words, this was yet another attempt by Satan to corrupt that line.

And now Hamor's son steps up to the mic:

Genesis 34:11-12

Then Shechem said to her father and her brothers, "Let me find favour in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give. Ask me ever so much dowry and gift, and I will give according to what you say to me; but give me the young woman as a wife."

It seems he is willing to do anything, whether it be out of love or lust. And he writes a blank cheque here, which is a very dangerous thing to do. Indeed, the short-sightedness of lust echoes throughout scripture...

We read how Samson traded his great strength out of love for a woman he never should have married. We see Herod promise up to half his kingdom for the sake of his step-daughter dancing in front of him. And we read Solomon's great warning about lust in Proverbs chapter 7, saying in the closing section of that chapter about that foolish man:

Proverbs 7:22-23

Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, Till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, He did not know it would cost his life.

As has been well said, sin will take you further than you wanted to go, keep you longer than you wanted to stay, and cost you more than you wanted to pay.

Here, while (in my opinion) Jacob should have swiftly moved on from the land and mixing with these wicked people, he pauses, and his sons now take matters into their own hands — something he should have prevented them from doing, as leader of his household:

Genesis 34:13

But the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father, and spoke deceitfully, because he had defiled Dinah their sister.

I wonder where they had learned to be deceitful from, with Jacob as their father and Laban as their great-uncle?!

Genesis 34:14-17

And they said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a reproach to us. But on this condition we will consent to you: If you will become as we are, if every male of you is circumcised, then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to us; and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. But if you will not heed us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and be gone."

Rather than address the wickedness of what Shechem had done in raping their sister — rather than deal with the sin — they leverage Shechem's lust or love for Dinah, and use religion as a tool for revenge, making this serious request to Hamor and Shechem. But how, you might wonder, is it deceitful? Well, we'll see in verse 25 on that they never intended to intermarry with the people of this city. But Hamor and Shechem fall for the trick:

Genesis 34:18

And their words pleased Hamor and Shechem, Hamor's son.

Now, I think I would have been asking "you want to do what?!!!" But evidently, there was such attraction Shechem felt toward Dinah, that we further read:

Genesis 34:19

So the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob's daughter. He was more honourable than all the household of his father.

So out comes the pocket knife, I guess! And he shows he is willing to go through with their request — not honourable in the sense that he was a thoroughly decent man, but only that he was willing to do what they asked in response to what he had previously done.

Genesis 34:20-21

And Hamor and Shechem his son came to the gate of their city, and spoke with the men of their city, saying "These men are at peace with us. Therefore let them dwell in the land and trade in it. For indeed the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters to us as wives, and let us give them our daughters.

And they must have been thinking, oh, well all this is great so far! How did you manage to get them to agree to that?! And then verse 22 comes...

Genesis 34:22

Only on this condition will the men consent to dwell with us, to be one people: if every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised.

You can imagine how grateful the men in the city feel about being signed up for this! "What's in it for us?!!" you can hear them asking! Well, Hamor and Shechem had thought of this it seems, for they also intended to deceive Jacob and his family:

Genesis 34:23

Will not their livestock, their property, and every animal of theirs be ours? Only let us consent to them, and they will dwell with us."

That is, they saw this as an opportunity to eventually own all that was Jacob's - and we know that he was a very rich man. And so convinced by this plan, we read:

Genesis 34:24

And all who went out of the gate of his city heeded Hamor and Shechem his son; every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

So, comply with this religious ritual they did, for the sake of what they could get out of it. But it made no difference to their hearts. Indeed, ritual and religion will never produce a relationship with God. Rather, repentance and faith in the completed work of Christ is what is required.

And so if you are single or dating, you must be very careful — for many a person has said they'll become a Christian, when faced with losing the opportunity to date or marry the true Christian they are in love with, but like Shechem, they go through the motions only for appearance sake, for what they can get out of it, and not because they want to know God.

Back here in this chapter, we see Hamor and Shechem's plan comes to nothing:

Genesis 34:25-26

Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males. And they killed Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went out.

So then, Simeon and Levi, sharing the same mother as Dinah, are enraged, and take their revenge upon not only Shechem, but every man in the city, committing this atrocious murder. Yes, what Shechem did was abhorrent, yes, this was a wicked city. But they went beyond dealing with sin, and sinned themselves. And, because of this act, the line through to Christ didn't pass through their descendants. This is a warning for us that we must not act in sin when trying to deal with it elsewhere — that's not a solution to the problem!

Furthermore, we then read that Jacobs sons went further still:

Genesis 34:27-29

The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled. They took their sheep, their oxen, and their donkeys, what was in the city and what was in the field, and all their wealth. All their little ones and their wives they took captive; and they plundered even all that was in the houses.

And in doing so, they were utterly wrong. So I should remind you again, that just because the Bible records an event or action, it doesn't mean it was good and right.

Reading on, we see Jacob now learns of all that had happened:

Genesis 34:30

Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I."

Despite God's assurance to Jacob that He would be with him, Jacob worries here. Though perhaps, he may have thought that God would not look favourably on him because of what his sons had just done. But the biggest issue we might find in Jacob's words, is that it seems he is worried about how he will look to *man*, rather than being aghast at the wicked nature of the crime his sons had just committed in *God's* sight. May we always consider what God thinks, above what man thinks.

Now, as we close this chapter, we see that Jacob's sons, challenged by him, have a ready response for him:

Genesis 34:31

But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?"

And I'm sure we can sympathise with their feelings — this was a horrible thing that had taken place to their sister. But two wrongs did not make a right, and they had now sinned horribly too. The application for us is simply that we are to trust God to work things out in light of eternity. It doesn't mean that we don't correct, rebuke or exhort. It doesn't mean that there should not be right and reasonable punishments for wicked crimes. But it does mean we have a personal responsibility to not take revenge ourselves, as we read in Romans 12:

Romans 12:17-19

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

Application questions

As we seek to apply these 2 chapters to our lives this week, thinking about the example of Esau contrasted to that of Simeon and Levi, let's consider these questions:

- Are you holding a grudge? If so, what are you doing about it?
- Who do you need to forgive?
- Are you letting anger and wrath fester in your life?

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