

# Outrage

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[ 0 : 00 ] What should we say about the events of chapter 4 in our holy book, the Bible? What should we say about it?! We should say, I think, what a wicked, shocking, deceitful, righteous, bloody mess.

! Don't you think? Through this series in the life of Jacob, two themes have emerged, it seems to me, time and time again. First, the complicated, painful sinfulness of families and communities. We've seen that in the story, brothers smashing into each other, passive, crafty fathers and a scheming mother, all the lies and tears and under the surface power struggles, the manipulation, the grudges of family life.

We've seen fighting jealous sisters desperate for love or children, sordid sexual deals, such misery and bitterness and hurt and anger in the growing family of Isaac.

We wince at that. Because if we're honest, to some degree, the family of Isaac does reflect the workings of our own hearts and our families and the world.

[ 1 : 16 ] The complicated, painful sinfulness of families and communities laid bare. And yet, at the same time, all the way through this narrative, the stubborn kindness and faithfulness of our sovereign God.

Because he knows and sees exactly what his world and his people are like. And yet, he doesn't turn away from us. Having made promises to bless the world through the family of Isaac and Jacob, he will not be derailed, come what may.

He sticks with his sinful people. He will not leave us. He will remain faithful. Seems to me that these two themes is exactly what we see again this morning in Genesis 34 and then the start of chapter 35.

First this morning, look with me at the events of chapter 34. What a wicked, shocking, deceitful, righteous, bloody mess it is. By the end of chapter 33, just a few verses back, Jacob has made it back from Paddan Aram and God has been with him.

He has his wives, his children, his flocks, his riches. He's been reconciled to his brother Esau and he's travelling his way back to Bethel and eventually to his father's house.

[ 2 : 39 ] He arrives safely just outside the city of Shechem, do you see? He sets up camp, he buys a plot of ground, he pitches a tent and sets up an altar. Lovely. But then comes an act of vile and atrocious wickedness.

Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had born to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. Two things. One, Dinah is just 15 or 16 years old at this point, no older.

Two, back then no way could any godly father let his girl go unaccompanied into an alien city full of prowling men.

Because look, verse 2, when Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and raped her. And the language is clipped and brutal.

He saw, he took, he lay with her, he violated her. And verse 3, although maybe genuine in some strange way, feels sickening, I think.

[ 3 : 52 ] His heart was drawn to Dinah, daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. And Shechem said to his father Hamor, get me this girl as my wife. We should say, as we read this, what utter wickedness has taken place.

Dinah, verse 5, has been defiled. She's been treated filthily. She's been spoiled. She's had her purity wrenched away from her. Shechem, middle of verse 7, has done an outrageous thing in Israel.

There's a little cluster of mostly sexual sins in the Old Testament that are termed outrageous. It means a moral outrage of the vilest sort against the human body and the will of God.

That must not be. Don't say she was asking for it. Don't say he loved her really and is trying to put it right.

It's vile wickedness. Notice next in verses 5 to 7, the reactions of Dinah's family. Jacob's silence, the brothers' shock and fury.

[ 5 : 06 ] When Jacob heard that his daughter Dinah had been defiled, his sons were in the field with his livestock and he did nothing about it until they came home. Literally, Jacob was silent.

Didn't send word to his sons. Other times, so emotional. Loving and trembling and weeping. Here, his own daughter having been defiled, nothing.

What's wrong with you? Then Shechem's father Hamor went out to talk with Jacob. Meanwhile, Jacob's sons had come in from the field as soon as they'd heard what had happened.

And they, in contrast to their father, were shocked and furious. It means an intense, bitter anguish and trembling rage in them.

Seeing their sister wronged and hurt because Shechem had done an outrageous thing in Israel by sleeping with Jacob's daughter, a thing that should not be done.

[ 6 : 02 ] For very obviously, when someone in your family is wronged terribly and traumatically, or when someone made in God's image is defiled and violated in this way, shock and outrage are entirely appropriate.

And Jacob-like silence is not. It isn't. I googled, are you outraged, this week. Fans of Bolton Football Club are outraged that their stadium is going to be renamed.

Drinkers of Lilt are outraged that it's being rebranded as Fanta, Pineapple and Grapefruit. It is very fashionable to affect outrage for anything you want.

We should recognise vile wickedness like this, and we should be outraged. When the Islamist group Boko Haram kidnaps Nigerian schoolgirls and carries them off, we should be shocked and furious. When gangs in Rotherham pick up kids from outside care homes.

[ 7 : 24 ] When gangs in Rotherham pick up kids from outside care homes and traffic and abuse them, we should tremble with rage. And when teenage boys and men, fed by their desires and hardcore porn, force themselves on less powerful girls and women, which is so commonplace.

We should be outraged at such wickedness. In verses 8 to 24, follow along with me, there's a lot of men talking.

And deceitful deal-making. See what happens. Hamor, Shechem's dad, is the ruler of the area. And he has power, and he suggests a deal to smooth things over.

Listen, he says, verse 8. My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife. Intermarry with us. Give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. You can settle among us. The land is open to you. Live in it, trade in it, and acquire property in it. Shechem gets involved too, in verse 11, to Dinah's father and brothers.

[ 8 : 42 ] I'll give whatever you want and pay whatever you ask. Just give her to me. By the way, all the while as this conversation goes on near Jacob's camp, Dinah, we'll discover later, is captive in Shechem's house in the city.

And her brothers know that. And their righteous fury at their sister's defilement is not lessened by this proposed intermarriage deal. And so, verse 13, with Jacob silent in the background, why is he not taking the lead?

Why is he saying nothing? In verse 13, because their sister Dinah had been defiled, that's the reason. Jacob's sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Hamor.

They've got a plan. I wonder if you think they're doing the right thing. They say, we can't give our sister to a man who's not circumcised.

That would be a disgrace to us. So if all your men become like us and get circumcised, we'll agree with you. But if not, we'll take our sister and go. Hamor and Shechem think great. And they go and speak to the men of the city.

[ 9 : 51 ] Come on, let's do this. And by the way, verse 23, won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? As well as that girl. So let us agree to their terms and we'll settle among us.

And so, verse 24, all the men who went out of the city gate agreed with Hamor and his son Shechem. And every male in the city where Dinah is held was circumcised.

Vile wickedness, silence, shock and fury, deceitful deal making. Now, righteous, question mark, bloody payback.

Three days later, while all of them were still in pain from their cuts, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, they're her brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male.

And Hamor and Shechem, his son, they killed with the edge of the sword and they took Dinah from Shechem's house and went out. At the beginning, Dinah went out and Shechem took her, attacked her.

[11:02] Here, in bloody payback, Dinah's brothers attacked, killed, took Dinah and went out. She's rescued. Then the sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city.

Which city? The city where their sister had been defiled. See, this is one man's act of wickedness. And for sure, Shechem deserves his fate.

But did it not take a city of men to close their ears to Dinah's cries in their midst and then cover over Shechem's crime? Is not the city also in some way deserving?

And so the sons of Jacob seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. And they carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses.

What do we do with that? You know, it says in the New Testament, in Romans 12, verse 19, Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath.

[12:16] For it is written, it is mine to avenge. I will repay, says the Lord. And that is right. You and I are never to take revenge.

Ever. Not because payback is wrong, but because God is the avenger. He is the one who will repay. Do you know this?

On the final day of judgment, when every hidden deed is brought out into the open, every Shechem will certainly receive their just punishment. From God, the judge of all.

It is not to us to repay. And in the meantime, before that day, we live now in a world with governments, the state, and a system of law and order.

And it also says in the New Testament, in Romans 13, verse 4, that the one in authority is God's servant for your good, the governing authorities. And if you do wrong, be afraid.

[13:20] For rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants. Agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. That is, today, the government, the state, bears the sword, in the language of the Bible, on God's behalf.

It is their job, not ours, to do all they can to capture and prosecute and punish rapists and sexual abusers. So you and I are not to copy the sons of Jacob.

We are not. And yet, in the badlands of lawless Canaan back then, with no civil government to turn to, you do see what they're bringing about, don't you?

Righteous, bloody payback for a vile and wicked crime against a 16-year-old girl who'd been defiled. I don't know if you remember the name Larry Nassar.

He was the doctor who abused dozens and dozens of young American gymnasts over a 20-year period. And at his trial, in her victim impact statement, a woman called Rachel Denhollander asked the question, how much is a little girl worth?

[14:34] And she answered like this, these victims are worth everything. I plead with you to impose the maximum sentence under the plea agreement because everything is what these survivors are worth.

And I think from one angle, Simeon and Levi, by their actions, unlike their father, they knew what their sister was worth in the eyes of God.

They did. Which leads finally to a deepening family split. Back in verses 5-7, after Dinah's rape, we were invited to compare the reactions of Jacob and his sons.

And so again here, after the attack on the city, look, verse 30. Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, you've brought trouble on me by making me obnoxious to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land.

We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed. I think he's so wordy, so concerned for himself, so fearful.

[15:51] There's no sense of his fatherly duty. There's no mention of the traumatised daughter he's just received back. Nothing like that. And in contrast, see the brothers with blood on their swords, eyes boring into their complaining father with the final word, should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?

It's a straight question for him and us. And the answer is no, no. That is Genesis 34. Did you notice, by the way, that God is entirely absent from the chapter? In the sense that he's not mentioned once. We're simply plunged into this wicked, shocking, deceitful, righteous, maybe bloody, family-splitting mess. And like in our lives today, maybe not everything is crystal clear. Maybe I've read it wrongly. Maybe Jacob is being silent yet careful. Maybe in their right fury, the brothers go way over the top. It is, though, a wretched, traumatic mess, isn't it? Such wickedness and hurt and deception. [17:18] And at the end of it, a trembling father and blood-stained brothers and a defiled daughter standing outside a looted city full of dead men. I don't know who you've connected with here in this story. For some of us, the experience of Dinah will trigger all sorts of memories and fears and maybe you didn't expect that this Sunday morning and I'm sorry about that, genuinely. Maybe it hurts you seeing that Dinah has no voice in this chapter. Maybe Dinah, having men in her family who care for her and come and get her, also touches you in a raw way. Maybe you're glad that the story of Dinah is here in the Word of God and not brushed under the carpet and maybe you're glad that her attacker gets what he deserves. Maybe you're a father or a brother and you look back with uncertainty or shame on how you once behaved. Maybe one day you helped try to cover up family wickedness. Maybe you've done an outrageous thing yourself. Or maybe just all of Genesis 34 makes you feel grubby and sad and angry and, well, this is what life in a fallen, sinful, hurting world in a church full of fallen, sinful, hurting families can be like and it's horrible. [18:53] It's just horrible. Can I say lastly this morning, because this is what Genesis presents to us, that in and through the wretched, traumatic mess, we do still have a gracious God and a faithful God.

Because I didn't ask Ruth to read it, but chapter 35, verse 1, should amaze us, really, from one angle. then God said to Jacob, here he is, the living God, the one who is in heaven and yet with his people, speaking once more to this passive, complaining, fearful failure of a father whom he had set his love upon.

And God said to Jacob, go up to Bethel and settle there and build an altar there to God who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau. And so Jacob said to his household, to Simeon and Levi and Dinah and the rest and to all who were with him, get rid of the foreign gods you have with you.

Because this family weren't worshipping God very faithfully, you know. And purify yourselves and change your clothes and then come, let us go up to Bethel where I'll build an altar to God who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have. says Jacob, he knows, he's not making it up, it's true. How wonderful to have a God who speaks and hears our cries of distress and answers us and who is with us wherever we go and whatever we go through.

[20:41] And so they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem and then they set out and the terror of God fell on the towns all around them so that no one pursued them as Jacob had feared.

And Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz, that is Bethel in the land of Canaan and there he built an altar and he called the place El Bethel because it was there that God revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

Forgive me if this is a bit fanciful. Can you imagine the people of God here gathered around the altar at this moment? It's not just Jacob anymore.

He's there with his growing family of wives and children and servants a testimony to God's faithfulness. In the middle at the front by the altar may be Jacob the complaining fearful failure. Maybe to his side Dinah wrapped in a blanket her head down and ashamed with a brother's arm around her shoulder. Simeon and Levi their swords put away eyes staring standing together and then Rachel and Leah and Bilhah and all the boys they've come through so much their histories so complicated their relationships a tangled mess their shame and hurt deep and their sins many and yet even now their God gathers them to himself and is with them and leads them and will not leave them.

[ 22 : 30 ] he doesn't wink at their sins you know doesn't pretend that what they've done doesn't matter he knew what happened in Shechem he knew who reacted how and why he knows people through and through every mixed motive every word and deed he knows you and me through and through and it will take the bloody death of his son nailed to a cross to cover over all of their sin and guilt and shame and all of our sin and guilt and shame but that is what our gracious and faithful God did on the first Good Friday he presented his son as a sacrifice of atonement on behalf of failing fathers and furious brothers and defiled women you know he presented his son as a sacrifice of atonement even for wicked

Shechems who come and confess their wickedness and turn to him in sorrow and he did that for the world so that today in the wretched traumatic mess of life where Genesis 34 happens he did this so that today he can gather a group of people to himself knowing everything we've done and he can forgive us and cleanse us and be with us and lead us home to glory this is what our world is like what a wicked shocking deceitful righteous bloody mess life can be and we should say what a gracious and faithful God we have who gathers us to himself and let me lead us in a prayer let's pray together our Lord and our

God we confess that sometimes we are blind to the wickedness around us and sometimes blind to the wickedness within us we see the events of Genesis 34 and we say rightly what an outrage we are those who sin we are those who've been sinned against we are those who hurt we are those who have been hurt we have mixed motives we overreact we stay silent we do not live as you would have us in your world our God we praise and thank you that you are a God of justice and that one day all evils will be dealt with we praise you that in your just love you sent your son to be a sacrifice of atonement for our sins thank you that we can gather in your presence this morning cleansed forgiven our guilt dealt with and our shame covered over and all of that because you are a loving gracious faithful

God to us make us those please who stand for what is right make us those who stand against evil make us those who cling to you our God for we ask in Jesus name Amen Amen Thank you.