

Struggling with compromise

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[0 : 0 0] chapter 34. We're up to Genesis chapter 34. Let's look at this together, and then we'll sing, and then we'll look at this passage together. It's quite a big passage. Jacob has just been reconciled to Esau. That's where we left him last time, and now he's basically in the promised land where God has asked him to go, though not quite where he should be, and we're about to look at the consequences of that, and then just everything in this dark passage of Scripture. So, this is about Dinah and the Shechemites. So, Genesis 34. Let's move through this quickly. 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 father Hamor, get me this girl as my wife. 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.

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, My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as his wife. Intermarry with us, give us your daughters, and take our daughters for yourself. You can settle among us, the land is open to you, live in it, trade in it, and acquire property in it. 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. 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, his father, and his father Hamor.

They said to him, We can't do such a thing. We can't give our sister to a man who is not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us. So, we will enter into an agreement with you on one condition only, that you become like us in circumcising all your males. Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We'll settle among you and become one people with you. But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we'll take our sister and go. Their proposal seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem. The young man, who was the most honored of all his father's family, lost no time in doing what they said. Because he delighted, he was delighted with Jacob's daughter.

[3 : 1 1] 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 are circumcised as they themselves are. Won't their livestock, their property, and all their other animals become ours?

So, let us agree to their terms and they will settle among us. All the men who went out of the city gate agreed with Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male in the city was circumcised.

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

They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses. Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, You have 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. But they replied, Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute? We'll end our reading at the end of this dark passage of Scripture. Let's stand and we'll stand.

Amen. Many thanks to the musicians, to the singers. Much appreciated. Let's come before God. Let's ask for his help as we seek to understand this passage together.

[5 : 28] Our loving Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the way in which the Holy Spirit himself has led and guided people to record, Lord, these historical accounts, but also, Lord, these theological accounts or implications for us in our ministry. So, Father, as we look at this time in Jacob's life, we pray that you would help us to understand it, to understand, Lord, perhaps the main message behind all of this. So, Father, be with us, we pray. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I wonder what you watch on television. I wonder maybe even on a Sunday night you go back and you can't wait to watch, I don't know what it is, Call the Midwife or whatever.

You'll have your favorite programs, whatever that is, whatever you like to watch in cinema or the theater or whatever. Or to put it another way, I wonder what you won't watch. Here are a couple of images here. Game of Thrones. Should Christians watch Game of Thrones? Quentin Tarantino movies.

I don't see anybody putting their hand up. These are my favorite or whatever. There are certain things that Christians think, whoa, we really shouldn't be watching that, or if we do, we're certainly not going to say it to anybody. Now, you might not watch these things. You might not think it's right to watch these things, and I'm certainly not going to promote them. But what I want to say is this, we might not watch that. There might be many things in the cinema or TV that we think, we just don't watch that. We're a Christian, we don't watch that. Well, you might not watch Tarantino movies or Game of Thrones, but you read about them. You might not buy a novel on these things and say, well, I don't watch Game of Thrones, but I've read the book. I don't watch this, but I read the book. And you think, well, that's just as bad. But the simple truth is, if you read the book of Judges, and if you read this account here, there's this chapter 34. Quentin Tarantino would just love to make a movie of that chapter. That one chapter, there's got rape, murder, mass murder. It's all in this passage. It's in the

Holy Bible. You have this passage that would turn your hair white. You wouldn't show this to folk, and you wouldn't show this to folk when this is the descendants of Israel. This is the 12 tribes doing this. How do we make sense of this, what's actually happening? And that's what we're looking at tonight. We are continuing this series of studies in the life of Jacob. We're looking at how God dealt with him as a person, but stepping back, we're looking at the big picture. Salvation, world salvation, is wrapped up in the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, through the 12 tribes, through the nation of Israel, all the nations of the earth will be blessed, pointing to Jesus coming. And if you've followed us just now, Jacob struggled for most of his life. He's just struggled in his family life, and having to flee home, flee from his brother, struggled with Uncle Laban, struggled, wrestled with God coming back, and then made peace with the Lord and also with Esau as well. Here's the map.

You remember, he's been a way up there. He's come a way down. The bottom of this Mount Seir is where Esau is. He said, I'll follow you. He doesn't do this. Hangs a right from Peniel to Succoth, where we left him last time, and on to Shechem. The same name as the, and the, basically the founder of this area of Shechem as well. He arrives there. But where he is, most of the commentators say, that's not really where he's supposed to be. He's not to go down south. He was told to return.

[9 : 21] And most of the commentators said, he should actually have gone to Bethel, 20 miles south. That was where he met God, where God said, I am the God of Bethel. Return to your own land. And most of the commentators would say, that's where he should be. He's 20 miles away. He's one day's walk.

But he decides to go there. Now, that's what I want to look at. I only have two points this evening, and I have to go through these fairly quickly, because there's quite a wee bit in them. But I want to go through them fairly quickly. He's still struggling, and maybe we still struggle with certain things in this passage. So, first of all, then, let's look at his struggling with compromise.

We are told in verse 18 of the previous chapter, after Jacob came from Paddan Aram, which is a way up 500 miles north, when he came from there, left Laban, he arrived eventually safely. Know that word, safely, at the city of Shechem, in Canaan, and camped within sight of the city. That's where we left him last time. He's arrived safely. And we don't know why he stopped there. Most of the commentators would say, it's probably because it looked good. It just looked good. He's there, a nice place to be. He's looking over the city, and he thinks, this is nice. He's, you'd be forgiven for saying to him, well, I don't blame you for struggling. Life has been struck 20 years, struggling 500 miles away, the tension of your brother. You probably just want to settle down and get on with life. And he wants a better life. And he chooses that place. It's not a place where he should have been. He should have moved further on. And it's amazing how you and I sometimes do that. We almost follow the Lord.

But we keep a wee bit for what we want, and we say, well, Lord, I know I should be doing this thing, but I'd rather also do this thing. Or I'll partially follow you, as long as I can get to do what I do. We view things with our naked eye, our human eye, and we think, well, I've weighed it up.

That might be good, but this seems to be better. And we start to follow this. We do not always seek first the kingdom of God. We do not always, like the early church, devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching, breaking of bread, and fellowship. And one of the worst things, or one of the worst conditions to be in as a Christian is to be lukewarm in the things of God. The church, Leodicea, was this. I know your deeds. They're neither hot nor cold. I wish you were hot or cold.

[12 : 04] But because you are neither one or the other, I'm about to spit you out of my mouth. The Lord would almost have us going that way or that way. But sitting on the fence and almost following the Lord is a dangerous position to be in. He's almost obedient. He's come 500 miles, and the last 20, he has fallen short. And Revelation 3.20, after Leodicea, you remember that's where that well-known misapplied verse that's often—I must confess, every time I hear folk quoting this in an evangelistic sermon, behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice, I will come in. Indeed.

To me, the Lord uses that truth about speaking to our heart, but that is speaking about the church. It's not speaking about a non-Christian. He's outside his own church, and he's knocking, and he says, open the door, let me in. And sometimes as Christians, the Lord can knock on the door of our heart. John, I'm not the center of your life. I'm there, and I'm knocking. Open the door and let me in.

And sometimes as Christians, we can do that. Jacob is very much like that just now. And he's expecting God to bless him when perhaps he's not seeking first the kingdom of God.

Sometimes we are the same. Sometimes we do not always pray to know his will. Jacob, at this point, had set up an altar. He's actually worshiping the Lord at this time, and yet not fully following on with him. He's still struggling, marrying his religious life with his secular life, his family life. And that's often the case. It can sometimes be leveled at us as Christians. We compartmentalize areas of our life. This is my church. This is my personal life, family life, work life, and never the two shall meet. We worship here, and then we leave on a Monday and watch me, Lord. We do our own thing.

We have our own agenda. And we should never separate both of those. All of our life is sacred and holy and dedicated to God, whether it's working in Dalkith or wherever that is, whether we live in Musselboro or wherever we live. Our whole life, he is Lord of all of our life. And Jacob, you get the impression, is still struggling with this. This area looks as if it's a good area to be. He's weighed it up, and he decides, I'm going to buy this land, and I'm going to settle here. And it looks good. I'm up elevated. I can look over the city, and it's just a bad move, because this really goes bad for Jacob to appear in this situation. In this very innocent place, or what appears to be innocent, although he's arrived safely—not that word. It's the narrator, the writer, Moses, writing this is—you can see what he's doing. He mentions that he arrived safely, but you read on, it was anything but safe for him and his family. And it certainly wasn't safe for the people who lived there, as we see what happened to them.

[15 : 19] But it starts very simply in this location. We are told in verse 1, Dinah, the daughter of Lear—you don't see any of this coming. In fact, some commentators say, why on earth is this here, this chapter here? And we'll look at this in a moment. It teaches us very much about the grace of God, but it's almost an offshoot, because it's mostly about his sons and about his daughter. It's not so much about him, although he is guilty in this way. Anyway, we're told that daughter, Leah, Leah's daughter, Dinah, goes out. She went out to visit the women of the land. I remember coming across this years ago, and it's such a real scenario. When I lived in Ballymena in Northern Ireland, pastor in the church there, if you know Ballymena, you leave from where we were. We were on one end of Ballymena, and you go through this wee place called Harryville. You have to expect to see a horse tied up outside the pubs. It was one of those kind of places. And when I read this, and I remember living there, the situation was always this. There was a car park, and there was young guys with their cars, and their flashy stuff in the cars, and boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. And they're, they're, so you love this. You see this everywhere you go, and that's their car. That's their impressive, and the girls are going, ooh, look at that. He's got a car. I wouldn't mind going with him.

That's exactly what happens here. It's as real as this. They might not be driving about in flashy cars, but she's out, a night out with the girls, meeting the women of the city. Some commentators said she should never have done this. She should have had a chaperone. She was marriable age, but she goes out, and maybe if you've got 11 brothers, you think, well, I'm Teflon coated.

They'll look after me, and so forth. And she goes out, and she meets, of all the people she meets, she meets the guy. What's the word my daughter's use about? They're fit, or something like that.

They're kind of, they're fit. It doesn't mean that they've got biceps. It just means, well, he's the guy. He is. He's the catch of the area. He's the prince. He's Shechem himself. He is the man called Balamina, or whatever. He is basically the prince, and sad to say, though, he takes her for more than a spin in his flashy motor. He rapes her, and it really is very sad. Verse 2, the ruler of that, when Shechem, son of Hamor, the Hivite, the ruler of that area, he's really well connected. He's the man. He takes her, and he rapes her. And it's, even the way it's worded, he sees her, he takes her, he violates her. It's basically, he is the ruler of the land. His dad does. He can do whatever he wants to do, and that's what he does. He responds in this. You have Jacob's response, and Jacob's response is pretty disappointing. In verse 5, when Jacob heard this, his daughter had been defiled. His sons were in the field. My version, NIV 2011 says, he did nothing about it. It's worded in that specific way, almost to shock you. His daughter's just been raped, and he does nothing about it. You wonder if he'd reacted the same way. If it was Rachel's daughter, and it's not just because she's female and it doesn't matter. As we see the sons, it matters to them, female or not. This is not something you do. But Jacob does nothing about it. You wonder why that is? It's been suggested because, you remember, in chapter 33, verse 19 before 34, that was the family or the father of Shechem that he bought the land from. He's a business partner. You don't just go off the hand. You think, wait a minute, this is a business colleague. How is this going to affect me in a business sense?

This is as if, once again, he's thinking of himself and prosperity, not really thinking about the bother or the damage that this has done to his own daughter. Family versus business. But the brother's response in verse 7 is very different. This actually has the words, as soon as they heard, shown the contrast. They were shocked and furious, or other versions say, filled with grief and fury. And this is when the situation turns very dark indeed.

[19 : 59] Up until this point, when these guys go on this spree, there's almost a kind of touching scene. Shechem falls in love with her, wants to marry her. If it was a movie, folk might be going, oh, oh, isn't that nice. They want to get married and so forth. Not for the brothers. The brothers are seething. And the fact that you have this touching scene, they will do, he wants to do whatever it takes. I just want your daughter, a lover, and so forth. I want your sister. And that's what makes what happens. Very scary indeed. And they have this debate and so forth, and to marry her. He loves her.

It's unlike, you remember, Amnon, David's son, who raped his niece. Remember, Tamar. And afterwards, he despised her. It says this, and Amnon hated her with an intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he loved her. Amnon said to her, get up and get out. Now, that's not what Shechem does. He does this, but he loves her. And that's what makes what happens next even more scary. You have this marriage proposal and so forth. Intermarriage, let's marry, let's get on, and so forth. We all marry your daughters, you can marry ours. It seems very, very attractive. And for Jacob, knowing Jacob, that's attractive.

He loves shortcuts. He loves getting on. He loves blessing and so forth. Here is a shortcut, in many ways, to the benefits of the promised land. We'll tie in with these folk. We'll marry their daughters.

We'll share cattle. We'll really work well together. But as you see later on, this was certainly the last thing that God would ever want. Intermarriage. Remember, in 1 Kings 11, there were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, you must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods. So, here we see this proposal to cut corners, to compromise once again. And here we see Jacob's brothers, Dinah's brothers. They're having none of this.

And they reply deceitfully. They're taking after their father in every way, replying deceitfully. Yeah, we'll do this. And they're thinking about what they're going to do, and they will reply deceitfully.

[22 : 41] And they are planning on revenge. But notice how they do this. They use circumcision as a way to try and bring this about. And most of the commentators rightfully point out that this is no way to treat circumcision. Circumcision is a holy thing. It's not us using communion in a deceitful way, not to remember the Lord in His own appointed way, but to act as revenge. It just doesn't bear thinking about.

This is no way to use circumcision. And yet, that is what they plan. In other words, they treat a holy thing as unholy. They're a bit like their dad. They're still trying to get on and plan and do what they want to do. And they disregard either God's clear instruction to go there or to treat circumcision. You remember that was the word that God gave to Abraham, very plain. Their grandfather, Jacob's grandfather knew this. Circumcision was inclusion into the family of God. They had no intention of using it for that. They just wanted them to be sore so they could descend upon them.

And here you see this bargaining tool, and it's presented to the town folk, and they think is great. There's so many wrong things happening in this passage that he's set this town, that he safely arrived in. Then you have this revenge and this murder. And it's no surprise to us that it's dying of fool brothers that take matters into their own hands, Simeon and Levi. There's no mention of Reuben. Reuben was perhaps of a more gentle spirit, as you remember when they were wanting to dump Joseph down the well. He was the guy that says, no, don't do this. Don't kill him. No, put him in the well, I mean. Don't kill him. So he was a more gentle. He might have thought maybe Simeon and Levi came up and said, let's do this, and he's no chance. But these two, her fool brothers, decide to do this.

And it's scary. And in many ways, they went far beyond. It's hard to say at this time. You could try and give them the benefit they don't and say, well, how are you supposed to repay? The law hasn't been developed yet. If your brother does this or this happens, somebody steals your ox. None of that's materialized up to this point. But they went far beyond. All they had was a get tough on crime policy.

That was all they had. And they thought, right, we're going to do this. But they went from one rape to mass murder, murdering men in this place and so forth. That's what these two brothers do, murdering these guys. And then the rest of them, they go on this looting and pillaging spree from verse 27 to 29. Look at that. So Jacob, the sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies. They looted the city.

[25 : 40] They seized their flocks, verse 28, and everything else in the city and out in the fields. They carried off all their wealth. All their women and children plundered everything in their houses. Wow, they were locusts. They left nothing in return. And they did this. And the way that this story ends is very sad.

Jacob is more concerned. Even after he sees what's happened to his daughter, what's happened to what his sons have done, he's thinking of himself once again. Verse 30, you have brought trouble on me, making me obnoxious. If these people join forces, they will attack me and my household will be destroyed. And they turn around and say, should he have treated, should they have treated our daughter, our sister, like a prostitute? What are we to make of this? This first point is very much a case of not following the Lord fully. The problems we get into when we do this, when we compromise, is he compromised? And not following the Lord fully, there's always repercussions. And we rob ourself of the blessing of God. And that's what you see here. And the main lesson in this first point is really to follow the Lord fully, to seek the best. Who knows what blessings we have hindered receiving because we have not followed the Lord fully. So that's the first point, struggling, beware of compromise. Lastly, and very quickly, struggling with grace. Struggling with grace.

You'd be, it'd be understandable if you were following the life of Jacob and you got to chapter 34 and you really didn't like Jacob. Kent Hughes says that. He says, personally, I have not found Jacob likable. The understatement. I really don't like this guy. And you get to the point, and sometimes we romanticize the whole thing. He's one of the patriarchs must be a good guy. He's an ordinary Joe. And he's a selfish guy, deceitful guy, and so forth. Doesn't always get things right. And Kent Hughes, in this chapter, paints a very graphic picture. He says this, Simeon and Levi, counted the hours, wetting their swords. Diner's brothers took their swords, came upon the city where it felt secure and killed all the males. In tandem, the brothers engaged in a genocidal spree, charging from house to house, shoving screaming wives and children aside and hacking the helpless victims to death. The murderous orgy ended with the execution of Hamor and the groom-to-be, after which the blood-soaked brothers led their trembling sister out of the wailing town.

It's quite graphic, isn't it? We have sanitized this and think, well, it wasn't bad. It really is quite bad. And the shocking thing in this is this was conducted by the people of God. And that should shock us. That has to shock us. You cannot read this and say it doesn't matter. He's a patriarch, and that's his sons, and they're named after the twelve tribes, and this is the way that it goes.

The justice and retaliation are completely out of balance and disproportionate. And there are some who would say it's the same today, that 36,000 people are killed, talking about Hamas and Gaza, for 100, 1,200 people are killed, but it results in the death of 36,000. And 250 hostages were taken, and 80,000 are injured. This is quite something. Now, you should get to this point in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation. And if you didn't know the rest of the Bible and you only had up to here, you'd be asking yourself, what does God do next? Does he give up on these people? Does he say, wow, these folk are bonkers? Oh, I'll choose somebody else. And another 12 tribes. He doesn't do this.

[30 : 20] And that is what's shocking about grace. We're singing amazing grace. The grace of God is more than amazing. It should shock us that God doesn't give up on this nation. He doesn't give up on them.

And Kent Hughes calls this fierce grace. It's a grace that should shock us. It's the grace that we're looking at in Jonah. How can the Lord save Assyrians? Assyrians were bonkers. They were evil.

They were slaughtering people. And God says to them, go to that city. Go to that great city and cry out against it. And cause them to repent. And if they repent, I will forgive them. And this is what Jacob eventually does in chapter 35. Well, look at that. He goes to Bethel. He eventually goes there. He builds an altar to God. And he says to Jacob, purify yourself. Get rid of your foreign gods. And so forth.

And he builds an altar there. He comes back to God. Bethel is the place of grace for Jacob. Come back to God. God will be gracious to you. Later on, it will be the tabernacle and the holy of holies that they will need when they sin against God. Today, it is Calvary. The place where people, the worst of sinners have to go, is to the cross. It is where the grace of God. We too need the grace of God. We mentioned this in Romans. Because of our stubbornness and unrepentant heart, we were storing up wrath against ourselves. Wrath and anger. But now God has presented a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of the blood of his Son to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness. Because in his forbearance, he left the sins unpunished. These sins are unpunished when you come to 35. They are still unpunished. All the sins of Israel are unpunished. Your sins and my sins are unpunished, except at Calvary. Calvary is where they are to be forgiven. I was walking through the meadows yesterday. The meadows had their big music things, stalls and so forth. And I just saw the big Palestinian march. You get them wherever you go now. And they're there. And because I knew I was preaching on this, and I thought, see if I went up to them and said, you know there was a time in

Israel's history where they did this. Twelve nations, twelve tribes. This is how they began. And this is what they did. They would have said, see? That's what I mean. That's exactly what they said. They would have said, thanks for sharing that. I don't know the Old Testament. Is that what they did? Boy, they're doing the same thing today. You would have got no grace. No grace whatsoever. And the simple term, we need to keep our eyes wide open. They, the people of Israel do not deserve salvation.

[33 : 20] We can romanticize this. They don't deserve this. You don't deserve this. Your family don't deserve this. We deserve the wrath of God. But grace is shocking that God has provided the sacrifice of His Son to forgive you all your sins, to forgive the sins of your family, to forgive the sins of Scotland, to forgive all the sins of Israel. No matter where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more.

You should thrill at that more than anything. That no matter how sinful the people of God come in the Old Testament and what they do in the New Testament, there is still grace. I was speaking to somebody in the Meadows where we're sitting, and he comes to a big church in Edinburgh, not Charlotte Chapel, and I said, how are you guys praying for the situation in the Middle East? And the leader stood up and said, it's a difficult situation, don't know really what to pray. We just need to pray that the troubles will be resolved. They weren't taken aside one way or another. Hot potato. But really, what you need to pray is not just a putting down of the weapons. The gospel has to flourish in both of those people groups. It's the only way. We mentioned this on a Wednesday. It's the only solution. We need to pray for the gospel to spread, for people to come to know the grace and the forgiveness of God. And that is really what is important here. That is the gospel. I'm not ashamed of the gospel, Paul says. It's the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Even Jacob, even the twelve tribes, even Reuben, even Levi, there is forgiveness for the worst of crimes when we come to the cross. So, that's all I want to say this evening. I wonder if you marvel at the grace of God. It's the only solution to sin, every sin, whether it's found in some day that we just find hard to believe that God could forgive, whether it's Assyrians, whether it's a crime that you just find horrendous, that there is grace held out in the gospel. You and I would not give the grace that God gives. We feel that people somehow have to earn it, or can't be too bad. Here is the nation, an embryo, doing this quite a horrendous thing, and yet there is grace, and God will lead them, and they will become twelve tribes. And through that, the Messiah will come from the, a line from the tribe of Judah. He will bring salvation, not only for that nation, but for all nations, even the nation of Scotland, and any other nation represented here this evening. Let's stand and sing a closing song only by...