

Genesis 34
Psalm 10
John 9

“The Rape of Dinah”

November 8, 2009

One of the advantages (disadvantages?) of preaching through books is that you have to preach on every passage.

Genesis has an awful lot to say about sex.

We’ve dealt with polygamy, homosexuality, incest,

and now rape.

I know that this is a delicate topic –
because some of you may have gone through this.
We are told that 17% of all women have been raped,
and 3% of all men.

It is one of the most traumatic things that can happen to a person.

That is why I wanted us to sing Psalm 10 in response to Genesis 34.
Psalm 10 may refer primarily to the “murder of the innocent” –
but it applies just as equally to the “rape” of the innocent.
The question of Psalm 10 is “why”?

“Why, O Lord, do you stand far away?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (10:1-2)

Why did you let this happen?
Why do you let the wicked rape and plunder the innocent?

Verses 2-11 then describe the way the wicked entrap the poor.
This may seem odd –
to sing about murderers and rapists and their stratagems –
and especially to the tune of “Abide with Me”!

But if you know the hymn, “Abide with Me,” it will make sense.
The first four stanzas of the hymn include why the presence of God is so needed:
1. “fast falls the eventide; the darkness deepens...helpers fail and comforts flee”
2. life is ending and everything I see is decaying
3. what but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
4. foes, ills, and tears are all around me

The difference between “Abide with Me” and Psalm 10
is that Psalm 10 loads all the darkness together.

And then, in verse 12, it pleads for God to do something!
“Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up your hand;

forget not the afflicted.”
The wicked think that you will never deal with them.

“But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation,
that you may take it into your hands;
to you the helpless commits himself;
you have been the helper of the fatherless.” (v14)

God *will* bring justice.
He *will* make things right.
Because *he* is king.

“O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted;
you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear
to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.” (v17-18)

Genesis 34 is loaded with ambiguities.
It is hard to find the “good guy” in the story.
Everyone winds up worse off at the end of the story than they were at the beginning.

Psalms 10 reminds us that when we are living in the middle of Genesis 34 sorts of stories,
we need to remember that God does see;
he will do justice.

And if you respond, “but how do I know?”
I will say, “Look at Jesus.”
The one who suffered the greatest injustice and humiliation in human history
was vindicated in his resurrection from the dead –
and now he sits at the right hand of the Father.
If God has vindicated Jesus –
then, in the end, he will also vindicate those who trust in Jesus.

Sing Psalm 10
Read John 9

Introduction: Rape and Plunder

When Jesus was asked why this man was born blind, he answers:
“that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

Does that sound like a satisfying answer?
Why is Dinah raped?
So that Simeon and Levi might be disinherited?

Terrible things *often* happen to people who have done nothing to deserve it:
whether a rare disease, or a “natural disaster,” or a horrific crime.

And people want to know *why*?

The disciples try to explain it in terms of guilt:

“Who sinned, this man or his parents?”

In other words, they operate under the assumptions of Job’s comforters:

bad things happen to you because you deserve it.

Calvinists are sometimes prone to accept this interpretation:

we believe in original sin and total depravity,

and so it is easy for us to say,

these things happen because you (or at least Adam) sinned.

And certainly it is true that all death and misery entered the world through Adam’s sin.

But that is not the answer that Jesus gives.

The disciples – together with Job’s comforters –

are giving a fundamentally earth-bound answer.

They want to explain everything in terms of a spiritual principle of cause and effect.

Jesus, on the other hand, insists that we need to look at the problem of evil from a heavenly perspective.

“that the works of God might be displayed in him.” (v3)

And he goes on in verse 5 to say,

“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” –

and then he promptly opens the man’s eyes so that he can see.

If all you do is look at the problem of evil in terms of me and my experience, you will never find the answer.

If you ask “why did God allow this to happen?”

And you only accept answers that say

“here’s the silver lining for me and my experience!”

then you are missing the point.

Sometimes there is no silver lining -- in this life.

Sometimes you have to trust that *in the end*

the light of the world will shine into every dark corner and make everything right.

Genesis 34 is that sort of story.

There are *so many* ambiguities in Genesis 34.

There are *no* good guys in Genesis 34.

At the end of the story *everyone* is worse off than he or she was at the beginning.

Dinah is no longer a virgin, and thus unmarriageable.

Hamor and Shechem are dead.

Simeon and Levi are disinherited.

And Jacob stinks in the nostrils of the Canaanites.

1. “An Outrageous Thing in Israel”: The Rape of Dinah (34:1-7)

*34:1 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob,
went out to see the women of the land.*

This is probably at least ten years after Jacob came back to the land.
We are told in 30:21 that Dinah was born “afterward”
which suggests that she was born “after” all the brothers.
By that time Dinah would be around 15 and her brothers are all 16-22.

At the end of chapter 33 we are told that Jacob has camped outside of Shechem.
The chiasitic structure of chapters 25-35 (book 8 of Genesis),
suggests that we should see this in parallel with chapter 26,
when Isaac settled in Gerar and nearly lost Rebekah to Abimelech.
When Abraham and Isaac live near the Philistines,
they nearly lose their wives to foreign rulers.

Now Jacob settles near Shechem,
and Dinah is raped.

Some have said that Dinah is raped because Jacob failed to fulfill his vow.
After all, Jacob had vowed to go to Bethel and worship God when he returned to the land.
But when you look back at 33:18-20
you see Jacob building an altar at Shechem –
precisely where his grandfather Abraham built an altar.

But blaming Jacob sounds an awful lot like the disciples:
“who sinned, Dinah or her father?”

Because others tend to “blame the victim.”
After all, Dinah goes out (apparently alone) – which is very dangerous.
To this day in many cultures if a woman is walking alone
she is saying that she is “available.”
When my college choir visited Russia 20 years ago
we were told that a woman walking alone is assumed to be a prostitute.

What is more, Dinah goes out to visit the women of the land.
These are Hivites,
who, like the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hittites,
are under God’s wrath and curse.
You may recall that Esau took Hittite wives –
and that Isaac and Rebekah grieved over this.

So the fact that Dinah is seeking out the company of the “women of the land”
is also problematic – but she is not at fault for what happens.

But verse 1 is the closest we get to understanding what Dinah is thinking.

For the rest of the chapter we will only hear what others think about her:
Shechem will rape her – and then love her.
The sons of Jacob will be furious that she has been defiled –
and Simon and Levi will slaughter the whole city because of her.
But what about Dinah?
Some see her as a helpless victim,
terrified as she is held captive against her will.
Others suspect that she may have been in love with Shechem from the start,
and that she snuck out to see her “boyfriend”
more than the “women of the land.”

Please, brothers and sisters,
don't go there!
The Word of God does not tell us what Dinah thought.

Why did this happen to Dinah?
It is not because Dinah or her father sinned.

It is true that fathers (and brothers)
should be careful to protect their daughters (and sisters).
It is true that women should be careful where they go (and with whom).
And certainly every reader of Genesis 34 should come away with that conclusion.

But Genesis 34 does not tell the story through the eyes of the victim,
but rather through the eyes of Shechem, the rapist –
and later, through the eyes of Dinah's brothers.

In other words, Genesis 34 shows us that rape is about power.
The rape of Dinah is part of the bigger story of how men like Shechem and Hamor
use sex as a means of increasing their wealth and power.

*2 And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her,
he seized her and lay with her and humiliated her.
3 And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob.
He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her.
4 So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, “Get me this girl for my wife.”*

Back in Genesis 6:2 we were told that the sons of God
“saw” and “took” the daughters of man (same sequence of verbs).
The same sequence of verbs was used in Genesis 3:6
when Eve “saw” that the fruit was desirable
and so she “took” of its fruit and ate.
And for that matter, when Pharaoh's servants “saw” Sarah,
they “took” her into his harem.

It is characteristic of the seed of the serpent that they “see” what they want,

and they “take” it.

Shechem rapes Dinah,
but then he falls in love with her and wants to marry her.

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

You need to understand the situation.
Shechem is the crown prince.
Hamor is the ruler of the region.
There is *no* recourse available to Jacob.
His daughter has been defiled.
Her purity has been besmirched.
She is no longer a virgin – and therefore is no longer marriageable.

*6 And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him.
7 The sons of Jacob had come in from the field as soon as they heard of it,
and the men were indignant and very angry,
because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter,
for such a thing must not be done.*

Genesis rarely provides commentary on the events it narrates.
But verse 7 makes a very clear statement!

The idea here is present throughout the scriptures, as Bruce Waltke says,
“Those who commit a moral outrage of the vilest sort
against the deepest realities and convictions of the community
must be punished to protect the fabric of the community.” (464)

If rapists are allowed to go unpunished, then no daughter is safe.

2. “Give Us Your Daughters”: An Indecent Proposal (34:8-12)

*8 But Hamor spoke with them, saying, “The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter.
Please give her to him to be his wife.*

Notice the plural: he spoke with “them.”
Jacob and his sons are now gathered,
and so Hamor asks for “your” (plural) daughter.

What is more he proposes a broader alliance:

*9 Make marriages with us.
Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves.
10 You shall dwell with us, and the land shall be open to you.
Dwell and trade in it, and get property in it.”*

Hamor offers these nomadic sojourners property rights.
If you dwell with us and intermarry with us,
then we will become one people.

11 Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers,

“Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give.

12 Ask me for as great a bride price and gift as you will,

and I will give whatever you say to me.

Only give me the young woman to be my wife.”

This demonstrates how smitten Shechem is.

After all, Dinah is “defiled.”

If her father and brothers reject this proposal,

then they will get Dinah back – and no one else will ever take her.

But rather than try to lowball Jacob,

Shechem makes an extravagant offer:

“I will give whatever you want!”

Though we will see in verses 18ff that his extravagant offer
is calculated for his own financial benefit.

After all, the proposal for intermarriage would bring Jacob under Canaanite rule.

If Jacob says “yes” to this,

then the promises, the blessings, the covenant of God
will vanish.

If the house of Jacob becomes part of the house of Hamor,

then everything Jacob has sought will be lost.

But if he says “no”?

His daughter remains in Shechem.

What will happen to Dinah if Jacob says no?

And so Jacob says nothing.

The silence of Jacob has long been criticized.

But what was Jacob supposed to say?

What do you say to a rapist who also happens to be the most powerful man in the region?

“He should have been a man and stood up to him!”

Really?

How do you know?

What we do know is that instead his sons answer deceitfully.

3. “Be Circumcised”: A Deceptive Proposal (34:13-17)

*13 The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully,
because he had defiled their sister Dinah.*

Verses 13-17 are at the heart of the passage.

Against the power play of Shechem and Hamor,
the sons of Jacob engage in their own “power play.”
But they use deception.
They are in a position of weakness,
so the only way they can rescue their sister is through guile.

14 They said to them,

*“We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised,
for that would be a disgrace to us.*

15 Only on this condition will we agree with you—

that you will become as we are by every male among you being circumcised.

16 Then we will give our daughters to you,

and we will take your daughters to ourselves,

and we will dwell with you and become one people.

17 But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised,

then we will take our daughter, and we will be gone.”

In verse 14 it is plainly the “sons of Jacob” speaking,
because they say “our sister.”

But in verse 17 they say, “our daughter.”

Why the change from sister to daughter?

Possibly this is reflecting the fact that this is a longer negotiation.

It may be that the brothers initiated the circumcision idea,
and that Jacob now ratifies it in verse 17.

But if so, it would seem that Jacob is sincere in his offer.

If the men of Shechem will accept the sign of the covenant,
then maybe that is the way out...

But at least two of his sons have something else in mind:

The part of Shechem’s body that sinned, will be the source of his punishment!

4. “Their Property Will Be Ours”: A Greedy Proposal (34:18-24)

18 Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem. 19 And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most honored of all his father's house. 20 So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying, 21 “These men are at peace with us; let them dwell in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters as wives, and let us give them our daughters. 22 Only on this condition will the men agree to dwell with us to become one people—when every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised. 23 Will not their livestock, their property and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us.” 24 And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

But Hamor and Shechem are too greedy to see through the ruse.
They see this as a way of drawing the Seed of Abraham into their nets.
If we are circumcised, then all their stuff will be ours!
If Jacob is thinking that Shechem is embracing the covenant promise to Abraham,
he is sorely mistaken!

But not as sorely mistaken as Hamor and Shechem!

5. “When They Were Sore”: The Rescue of Dinah (34:25-29)

25 On the third day, when they were sore,

In the member that had offended, Shechem is judged!

*two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords
and came against the city while it felt secure and killed all the males.*

*26 They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword
and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went away.*

*27 The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city,
because they had defiled their sister.*

*28 They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys,
and whatever was in the city and in the field.*

*29 All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives,
all that was in the houses, they captured and plundered.*

Some have said that this is overkill.

Some say that Shechem was the only guilty one.

But that misses the point.

Every man in the city who accepted circumcision was guilty.

Every man who accepted circumcision

was endorsing the actions of Hamor and Shechem.

Simeon and Levi hold the city accountable for the sin of its ruler,

and by killing every male, they prefigure the holy war that God will send
when Joshua brings Israel into the land.

Those who curse the seed of Abraham will be cursed.

Shechem has cursed the seed of Abraham –

and so his city has received the judgment of God.

Genesis 34 portrays the actions of Levi and Simeon rather favorably.

Through their action, judgment day comes upon the Canaanites in advance.

There is only one problem:

Jacob disagrees with this.

Conclusion: The Ambiguity of Judgment (34:30-31)

30 Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi,
 *“You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land,
 the Canaanites and the Perizzites.
My numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me,
 I shall be destroyed, both I and my household.”*
31 But they said, *“Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?”*

In Genesis 49:5-7 Jacob will condemn Simeon and Levi to be scattered among their brothers,
and he curses their anger and disinherits them.

Genesis 34 is given to us to explain *why* Jacob cursed them and disinherited them!
Genesis 34 explains why Simeon and Levi have no inheritance of their own.

And yet Genesis 34 gives Simeon and Levi the last word.
 Jacob is concerned about stinking in the nostrils of the Canaanites and Perizzites.
 Simeon and Levi were concerned for the honor of their sister.

What should we make of this?
 It’s easy to use Genesis 49:5-7 to say that Simeon and Levi were wrong.
 In their anger and wrath they overreacted and wrongly slaughtered the whole city.

But this curse is spoken by the man who did nothing in Genesis 34.
 Should we understand Jacob’s curse on Simeon and Levi to imply divine disapproval?
 Or should we take the fact that they get the last word to imply divine approval?

I can’t decide.
 What I see in the text drives me relentlessly to a single conclusion:
 God is silent.
 And as long as God is silent, everyone loses.

There have been other chapters where God has played a very distant role,
 but Genesis 34 is the first chapter in Genesis where God is utterly absent.

At the end of chapter 33 Jacob builds an altar to El-Elohe-Israel (God, the God of Israel).
At the beginning of chapter 35 God will call Jacob to go to Bethel.

But here in Genesis 34, God is silent.
 God had told Jacob that he would be with him.
 But now God is silent – and Jacob doesn’t know what to do.

And when God is silent everyone suffers:
 Dinah is raped,
 Jacob is paralyzed with fear,
 Shechem and Hamor are brutally murdered,
 the inhabitants of Shechem are slaughtered and plundered,
 and Simeon and Levi are disinherited.

When God is silent, even Jesus will say,
My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Psalm 83 reflects on this:

“O God, do not keep silence; do not hold your peace or be still, O God!”
When your enemies rise up against your people,
you are the one who must speak.
Because if you do not speak, if you do not act,
we are dead.

And, you see, this is the difference between the rape of Dinah and the cross.
In the rape of Dinah God is silent and everyone loses.
But in the cross God’s silence gives way to his speech in the resurrection of Christ.

And in the resurrection of Christ God answers Dinah,
as well as all of his people who have suffered unjustly.
In the resurrection of Christ God has promised that he will make all things right –
as Paul says in Acts 17:30-31
“The times of ignorance God overlooked,
but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,
because he has fixed a day
on which he will judge the world in righteousness
by a man whom he has appointed;
and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

God will make all things right.
He will judge the world in righteousness.
He will fix everything and make it right.

How do you know?
Because he has raised Jesus from the dead.

As Jesus says in Luke 13:1-5,
when asked about those who suffered unjustly,
“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans
because they suffered in this way?
No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

Suffering is a sign of the coming judgment.
It is a sign of God’s common wrath.
This is what is coming upon all the earth.
This is what will happen to you unless you repent.

As long as God is silent, everyone loses.
But now that God has spoken in the resurrection of Christ,

everyone who repents and believes in him will be saved.