

44. The Perils of Peace and Plenty (2007)

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[0 : 01] Well, that's all we have today, so we're going to turn to our Bible reading, and you'll find that in the book of Genesis, and if you have one of our church Bibles, our visitor's Bibles, I think you'll find it on page 28, but at any rate, it's the first book of the Bible, and we're going to read together in Genesis chapter 34, and into the first few verses of Genesis 35, continuing our series in this book of beginnings, and recently in the studies in the life story of Jacob and his family.

And we need to brace ourselves, because this is far from a savory chapter. Jacob is now back, at last, in the promised land, living in Shechem, in the land of Canaan, and we're told at the end of chapter 33, God bringing him there in peace, in answer to his promise, and now we read on in verse 1 of chapter 34.

Dinah, the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land. And when Shechem, the son of Hamor, the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and humiliated her, shamed or violated her.

And his soul was drawn to Dinah, the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, Get me this girl, take me this girl for my wife.

Now Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah. His sons were with the livestock in the field, and Jacob held his peace.

[1 : 53] Until they came, Hamor, the father of Shechem, went out to Jacob to speak with them. The sons of Jacob had come in from the field as soon as they heard of it, and the men were indignant, grieved deeply, 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.

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. Make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves.

You shall dwell with us, and the land shall be opened to you. Dwell. Trade in it. Get property. Possess it. 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.

Ask me for as great a bride price and a gift as you will, and I will give you whatever you say to me. Only give me the young woman to be my wife. The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah.

They said to him, We cannot do this thing to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us. Only on this condition will we agree with you, that you will become as we are, by every male among you being circumcised.

[3 : 24] 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. But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and we will be gone.

Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem, and the young men 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, so Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city, that's the public square, and they spoke to the men of the city, saying, 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. 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.

Will not their livestock, their property, and all their wealth be ours? Only let us agree with them. And they will dwell with us. And all who went out of the gate of the city listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

On the third day, when they were sore, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's fool brothers, took their swords and came against the city while it felt secure, and killed all the males.

[4 : 51] They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went away. The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister.

They took their flocks, their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field, all their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses they captured and plundered.

Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, You have brought trouble, ruin on me, by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

My numbers are few, and if they attack themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household. But they said, Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?

And God said to Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.

[6 : 01] So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.

So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods they had and all the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem. And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them.

So that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. Amen. May God bless to us this His word.

Well, do turn with me, if you would, to the passage we read together there in Genesis chapter 34. A chapter, I think, all about the perils of peace and prosperity.

You may well have been wondering as we read this chapter, what on earth is this chapter doing in the middle of our story about Jacob? You may have been thinking, what on earth is a chapter like this doing in the Bible at all?

[7 : 18] Maybe you're still thinking that. Maybe you're thinking, surely we cannot possibly have a sermon on a chapter like this. Well, I've been asking myself that question all week.

And let me tell you, it's not at all easy. It's a very difficult chapter in all sorts of ways. It's difficult to stomach. And it's difficult also to handle properly.

So that we come away with a clear understanding of what God is, teaching us about Himself, about His holiness, His goodness, about His promise, about His kingdom.

And also about the very real sin and folly of His own chosen people, who far too often are set before us as an example in all of the wrong ways.

But the fact is, here it is, in front of us. It is the Word of God, isn't it? And so we must take it seriously. So what is it doing here?

[8 : 20] And what is it teaching us? Well, for one thing, a chapter like this surely shows us the Bible's honesty. There's no airbrushing out the unsavory blots in the lives of the Great One of Faith, is there?

The Bible is not sycophantic hagiography, like some Christian biography is. No, the Bible is warts and all honesty. And it is reality, not fantasy.

It's real life, which is not like the fairy stories, where everything turns out lovely and nice. Now there's an awful lot of dirt and mess and horror in real life.

And the Bible doesn't dodge that. It's real and it's honest. And that's one good reason, I think, why we can trust this book. Second thing, of course, is that this chapter is a very important part in the bigger unfolding story of the book of Genesis, which is shortly to move closely in its focus onto the story of Jacob's sons.

And of course, one son in particular, Joseph. The last 14 chapters of the book are focused on that famous drama, where, in fact, the vicious and the vengeful actions of Jacob's sons is what put Joseph into slavery.

[9 : 45] From where, of course, in God's amazing providence, he becomes the savior from famine and from death. And through whom the great multiplying of God's people takes place in the land of Goshen, the best pasturing in Egypt.

Well, this chapter here gives us a glimpse ahead of time of what's coming. Gives us a glimpse of the way that these brothers operate. And also, I think it gives us something of a glimpse as to the reasons for them being the way they are.

They resent their father's favoritism of Joseph. And they also resent his apparent lack of care for the sons of Leah and his concubines, his unloved wives.

And also, this chapter, his seeming disinterest, his passivity when Leah's daughter is dishonored. Jacob's sons, we see here, are unrestrained in their behavior and they have little respect for their father.

And already, we're seeing them as a force, undisciplined and disrespectful. And so, when we get to chapter 37 and the story of Joseph that follows, there isn't really anything too much that should surprise us.

[10 : 58] it's important to see that as the wider context of this chapter. It's not on its own, it's part of a much bigger story. But thirdly, if we do think of the immediate context of this chapter, I think we'll also see that there's nothing random about it.

It follows chapter 33 very deliberately, even though it seems that perhaps ten years or so have passed between the events that we looked at last week and this week, Jacob's children were very young when he fled from Laban, but clearly here, his daughter Dinah, one of his youngest ones, is now at least in her mid-teens and his sons in the late teens are even older.

Now, we've seen, haven't we, the twin dangers all the way through the story of God's covenant people. The danger, on the one hand, of outright opposition by force, as well as the more subtle threats.

From within. The compromise to lose their distinctiveness as God's people, to lose the characteristics that they were called to show.

Well, we saw last time in chapter 33 that the threat was annihilation. It was a threat of outright attack from Esau and his army. But now, we've got Jacob living back in the land of Canaan.

[12 : 21] He's apparently at peace. He's apparently very prosperous. And it's a very different kind of threat that he's facing now. It's the very real threat of assimilation, of gradually being conformed into the image of the culture round about so that soon the people of Israel could become just like the pagans living in the land.

So that they would very quickly not only be in the land of Canaan, but of the land of Canaan. In the words of verse 22 in our chapter, dwelling with them to become one people.

Those little phrases, with us and one people, they pepper this chapter there in verses 9 and verse 10, again in verse 16, and verses 21 and 22 and 23.

And that is the real key, I think, to everything that is going on here. Jacob may at last be back in the promised land, but the struggles and the battles of faith are not yet over, not at all.

And in many ways, what we see here is that the perils of peace and of prosperity in the life of faith prove more dangerous, more dangerous than the troubles of real adversity.

[13 : 42] And strangely, that's the very message that Andy Gemmell was preaching on from James chapter 1 on Wednesday at lunchtime. And if we remember to whom Moses first spoke and wrote these words, I think it will help us understand a lot better the very warnings and also the encouragements that this chapter has for us as the people of faith today.

Moses spoke and wrote to the Israelites who were about to re-enter the land themselves after their captivity in Israel. And they had many struggles and many very real violent threats on the way.

But as they are about to enter the land themselves to the place of peace and prosperity, a land flowing with milk and honey, Moses is saying to them, don't be naive.

This is not the end of your trials and your temptations. In fact, it's just the start of a whole new set of difficulties, just different ones.

So be on your guard. Remember, you're to live in the land of Canaan, but you are not to become of the land of Canaan. You're not to become just like the pagan world round about you, either in your behavior or in your thinking.

[14 : 54] Beware the perils of peace and prosperity. Just listen to some of the words that Moses spoke to the people of Israel as they were about to enter the land. He says, when the Lord brings

you into a land of plenty, where you will have all you need and more besides, and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the house of Egypt.

Him shall you serve. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the people all around you. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters to your sons.

For they would turn you away from following me to serve other gods, but you are a people holy to the Lord, your God. Deuteronomy chapters 6 and 7.

And that's a stark warning from Moses, isn't it? About the very real danger of assimilation of God's people, of God's church, whatever age they're in, to becoming one people with the people of the world.

And it's that very real threat that is illustrated in this chapter. The threat of an unequal yoking that very quickly leads to disaster.

[16:17] Oh, that'll never happen to us, Moses. I'm sure that's what the Israelites said when Moses gave these warnings, just as we think, oh, that could never happen to us. That would never happen to me or to my family or to our church.

That's how I used to think as a student when we were told that a very large percentage of those active in student leadership in the Christian unions and serving on the committees of these unions, that a very large percentage of them had turned their back on their Christian faith completely within a few years of leaving university.

I did not believe it. But 20 years on, I've seen it exactly as we were told. And friends, that's why these chapters are in our Bibles.

The Apostle Paul is very explicit in 1 Corinthians 10. These things, he says, quoting a whole lot of events from the Old Testament like that, these things are written for our instruction as New Testament Christians.

Therefore, if anyone thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall. That's what the Apostle of Christ says. If the illustrious patriarch Jacob and his family face such things, and were entangled, and were engulfed by them, then so can you.

[17:35] And that's the truth. And that's the stark warning of a chapter like this. These things are written for us, upon whom the age of fulfillment of the Spirit has come in Christ.

And we need these gracious warnings. things. But of course, Paul also does say to us that nevertheless, there is encouragement for us in these same scriptures, so that we also might have hope.

Hope in the extraordinary mercy of God that persists and overcomes even the extraordinary mess that so often does seem to engulf his own people.

people. And that's what this chapter is all about. Well then, by way of orientation, let's just look a little more closely at this grim text and try and see both the warnings and the encouragements that it has for us.

It falls really into two parts. First of all, the events surrounding the violation of Jacob's daughter in verses 1 to 12. And then the events surrounding the vengeance of Jacob's sons in verses 13 to the end.

[18:43] And it's a kind of sandwich structure. The violent action is at the beginning and the end. And in the middle we have all this parling and pact making that we see. So let's look first of all then at the violation of Jacob's daughter and what it leads to.

It's a story of defiling passion that leads then to a far more dangerous proposal. Verses 1 to 7 then describe a shameful passion that brings defilement to the whole covenant.

family. The first few verses relate a very sad but rather unsurprising tragedy in the family. It begins verse 1 with something that seems very innocent.

Dinah, the daughter of Jacob and Leah, went out to see the woman of the land. Seems innocent but actually that should surely set alarm bells ringing, shouldn't it?

We remember the story thus far because it's the Canaanite women who repulsed Abraham and Isaac and their wives. Remember Abraham's words in Genesis chapter 24, not one of these Canaanite women for my son.

[19:53] They were particularly hideously immoral people. And Isaac and Rebecca too were deeply distressed that Esau, their son, had gone after these women. That's one of the reasons they gave for sending Jacob far away to Haran to find a wife for himself.

So this in verse 1 is bad news. It bodes ill. And I think we're being told that Dinah's motives were certainly rather suspect here.

She is not fully innocent. She wants to get in with the cool young women of the land. She wants to join in with just the same things that they do. Nothing is so very different after a few thousand years, is it?

She'd be fine. She could look after herself. That's what she thought. But of course in the real world things are rarely that simple, are they? If you play with fire, it doesn't take long until you're burned. And if you're a pretty teenager, and all the women in the Israelite family seem to be very pretty, then you'll be seen as well as seeing things. And seen she was, says verse 2, by, well, the bloke that all the girls must have surely thought was the catch of the entire city.

[21 : 05] She was seen by Prince Shechem. And what happened next is what does happen so commonly in these situations. Verse 2, he saw her, he took her, he laid her, and he shamed her.

He conquered her. Took her virginity and a culture in particular where that robbed her of any possibility of being pure for any other man at all.

It's not entirely clear how forcible this was. Some think it was rape. The language can imply that, but not necessarily so. Maybe that it's deliberately ambiguous here because I think, as I've said, Dinah is not portrayed in an entirely innocent light.

But I think there can be no doubt that Moses does severely condemn Shechem for his action. It's a willful and a selfish taking in sin. Like Eve, who saw and took the forbidden fruit.

Like the tyrants back in Genesis 6, who saw and took women forcibly for their wives. He took advantage of this girl. And verse 7, if you look at it, is absolutely unequivocal, isn't it?

[22 : 17] It was an outrageous thing in Israel. Such a thing must not be done. That's language that Moses here would be very familiar with. It's all through the books of Moses.

It's always used to mean a scandalous thing, like Achan's sin in Joshua chapter 7, or the hideous and perverse crime of the men of Gibeah that you read about in Judges 19, or indeed sexual promiscuity of an unmarried woman in Deuteronomy 22, and many other places.

And clearly here it is Shechem who is the responsible party. Whatever Dinah's mixed up emotions might have been, he is condemned. And yet, it's not that simple because even Shechem is not utterly monstrous, is he?

Verse 3, he speaks tenderly to Dinah. He loves her, he's desperate to marry her. She's not just a whore to him, it's more than that. So he asks his father, the crown prince, to get this girl, take, same verb, take this girl for me.

He does defer to his father, but he clearly doesn't expect no for an answer, does he? Well, what about Dinah's father? Verse 5, he hears of this shameful defilement on his daughter's honor, and he does nothing.

[23 : 40] He says nothing, he holds his peace. We don't know for how long, but certainly it is the pagan prince who takes the initiative, who comes to see Jacob and says, look, we've got to do the right thing here.

Not Jacob, he's silent. By the way, the penalty for such an act in the law of Moses was actually very practical. Since a girl like that could not marry any other man in future, then the man in question had to marry her, and he would never be allowed to divorce her ever again.

He had to compensate the family as well, but he had to marry her. You can read about it in Deuteronomy 22, verse 28. So the pagan, Hamor, seems to want to do the right thing here.

Although you'll note there's no real apology, there's no shame. But Jacob, Jacob seems remarkably disinterested. John Calvin here suggests that Jacob is so grief stricken that he can't speak, but for once I really have to say I think John Calvin gets it completely wrong here.

No, it's Dinah's brothers who are full of grief. That word indignant in verse 7 is only elsewhere used of God's terrible grief at the sin of man. For example, in Genesis 6, verse 6, they are rightly grieved and rightly angry because an outrage has been committed not only against Dinah but against the whole community.

[25 : 07] But not Jacob, it seems. In fact, the astonishing thing in this whole story surely is Jacob's astonishing passivity and weakness. The return of his fearfulness, as verse 30 is evidence of his attitude that seemingly just wants to appease and just go for the quiet life.

It's extraordinary. Why such a contrast to the courageous leadership we saw last time in chapter 33? 33. Very common for evangelical preachers to explain it.

That's, ah, you see, Jacob is in the wrong place. Jacob stopped short of full consecration to God. He's living in second best. He's living out of God's will because Jacob should have been at Bethel, not Shechem.

That's why all this happened. Jacob stopped short of the place God called him to go to. I find it difficult to be persuaded of that because I can't find the text telling me that Jacob was specifically called to go immediately to Bethel.

God called him to go back to the land of Canaan. And verse 18 of chapter 33 tells us God brought him in peace to the land of Canaan. Yes, in chapter 35 God does tell him to go to Bethel, but then he goes on again from Bethel after that with no censure from God.

[26 : 32] So I think we've got to be cautious about slamming Jacob merely here because of his geography. And that sort of way of thinking can be a dangerous way for Christians to think.

Why am I facing such troubles in my life or in my family or in my work or whatever it is? Have I made a terrible mistake that has put me out of God's will? Have I taken the wrong job? Have I lived in the wrong place? Have I done the wrong thing? Have I made the wrong decision? Am I now out of God's will and I'm not sure if I can get back into it? That can cause all kinds of anxiety for people.

It's a very unhelpful way of thinking. The answer of course is no. You're not out of God's will and you can't be out of God's will in that way. Of course it may be that you know you're deliberately living in defiance of God's clear commands.

That's quite different. But the answer to that is not go delving around in the past for some decision that has brought this fate upon you. The answer to that is to repent today of your disobedience and to obey God.

[27 : 38] I don't think it's just Jacob's geography here. But it is possible, isn't it? It is possible just to grow weary of the struggle of the life of faith.

Don't you find that? Just to want to be done with all the battles. And all the hassle and all the struggles of living in loyalty to Christ and his gospel.

I don't know about you, but I was so struck last Sunday evening by some of those words in 2 Samuel 21. There was war again between Israel and the Philistines and David grew weary. Do you remember? And there was war again. And again there was war. And there was war again. And Jacob grew weary, I think, as do we.

It's so easy, isn't it, just to want to let up and let go, just to settle in and settle down, to want no longer to be the outsider, no longer to be the odd one out, different from everybody else in your school, different from the others in your college class, different from your folk in your office, different from your wider family, just different.

[28 : 49] the outsider. Well, I wonder if that was Jacob here. I think we have to admit that at least in his attitude he is being rebuked here, both in the laxity which he allowed his daughter to dabble in the pagan culture roundabout, and also in his apparent lack of concern at what happened.

I guess there's a sobering word, isn't there, for those of us who are Christian fathers today? We're going to be good and godly guardians of our children. We need to see the danger, don't we, of letting them see for themselves the things of the world, to find their own way around the culture that's all around us that is so dangerous.

No. It's our responsibility, isn't it, as fathers in particular, by prayer and by precept and by example, to teach our young ones how to be in the real world.

not hermetically sealed from it, not trying to keep them away completely from this world. We can't do that. But teaching them to be in the world, but not of the world, not confirmed to the world with all its lurking dangers.

Well, these verses are a sad story of defiling passion. But as I said, it brings a far more dangerous proposal. In verses 8 to 12 speak of a seductive proposal that brings real danger upon the whole church.

[30 : 24] Hamer's words in verse 8 are very polite and respectful. Oh, please give your daughter to be my son's wife. But it's not quite so innocent as it seems because, remember, Dinah is being held effectively hostage in their city and in his house.

Whether she was happy about that or not, we don't know. Well, Shechem, Shechem clearly wants her. He's infatuated with, I'll give you anything for her, he says in verses 11 and 12.

But Hamer, his father, has a much bigger prize in view. Look at verses 9 and 10. And this is where the real danger is. His proposal is for full assimilation.

Make marriages with us widespread, he says. Dwell with us. And we will make the land open to you. We'll give you property to possess. We'll let you dwell and trade.

That word possess, property, is exactly the same language as God's promise to Abraham. The land shall be your possession. So here's an offer of the very thing that God has promised, but from the hand of a seductive prince.

[31 : 33] At the mere price of giving up the struggle and forgetting about being a distinctive people. All you need to do is ignore what God said to you.

Did God really say that to you anyway? Be at peace with us. Dwell with us. Become one with us. And it's again, verse 16 and verse 22 and verse 23, it reveals the real truth about what this is all about.

Do you recognize that seductive voice? It's the serpent's voice, isn't it? Genesis chapter 3, I'll give you all that God has promised, but much more easily.

Or in Matthew chapter 4, I can give you all these kingdoms of the world, Jesus, if you'll just worship me, be at peace with me, no longer be in struggle and war and strife against me.

That's the voice that says the same thing to you and to me all the time, every day, isn't it? Come on, there's no need to keep up this struggle, just be like everyone else, join in, that's the way of peace and fulfillment.

[32 : 40] I'll give you the world, if you do that. It's a siren voice always to the church of Jesus Christ, isn't it? Come on, you need to fit in with this 21st century world, ditch these hang-ups that you've got, that separate you from us, especially these ridiculous, peculiar sexual mores that you cling on to.

Just move on, become one people with us, and you'll have all the success, you'll have all the relevance, that you'll long for, you'll have all the influence that you crave in the church.

You think this ancient book of Genesis is irrelevant today? Could have been written yesterday, couldn't it? Well, the people of God here were in danger, and the problem is, friends, that once you get into a mess, because you've been living too close to the world's culture, it's very, very hard to get out of that mess again, without even more mess, and more heartache, and more pain.

And that's sadly what we see in the account of the vengeance of Jacob's sons. In verses 13 to the end of the chapter, we're told of a deceitful pact that leads to a disgraceful pillaging of the city of Shechem.

Verses 13 to 24 tell us of a scheming fact, a scheming pact that in fact reveals deceit not only among the people of God, but also among the pagans.

[34 : 10] These verses show us, don't they, that Jacob's sons were a smart bunch, they were a resourceful team, they were quick thinking, they were clever. We'll see that later on in the Joseph story. But here as there, they don't use their strength sadly in the right way.

There's no doubt, no doubt at all that the writer agrees with their attitude of grief and anger at Shechem's wrongdoing. But there's equally no doubt that their conduct is not endorsed as the right way to remedy that.

You might ask yourself, well what else could they do? Clearly a polite decline of this offer wasn't really possible because well they were holding Dinah hostage. Maybe a threat of direct war would have been effective.

Verse 17 rather hints about that. maybe, maybe, they could have sought to persuade Shechem, this pagan prince, really to become one of them, really to become a worshiper of the true God.

Well, however any of that might have been, in fact, verse 13 says they acted deceitfully, a word that's always pejorative in the Bible here.

[35 : 31] It's just the same word used in chapter 27 verse 35 where Jacob came deceitfully to Isaac to wrest the blessing from Esau. So we're being told, aren't we, that they learned this behavior in the home.

home? That's another sobering word to parents, isn't it? And despite their outrage, I'm afraid this does not really seem to be zeal for the honor of the Lord and his kingdom.

It seems much more a sense of personal grudge that motivates them because they don't honor, but rather they scandalously abuse the covenant sign of circumcision.

They empty it of all its true meaning and they use it sacrilegiously to achieve their own bitter ends. And that is the essence of sin, is it not? To turn the things of God upside down so that we make God become our servant instead of us serving God.

We use religion for the ends of man. And that's exactly what the brothers are doing here. They take a sign of God's grace and they make it into a symbol of grasping, of getting, a symbol of the pride of man.

[36 : 45] It's the very essence, isn't it, of sectarianism. It looks superficially like a kind of godly zeal. But of course it's nothing of the sort.

It's the very worst kind of religious pride. It's self-serving, it's self-justifying, and therefore it leads to hatred, it leads to ugly wickedness, as we all know. The Shechemites, for their part, they also demeaned the sign of circumcision.

For them too, it was just something they wanted to use for their own gain. Verse 23 is clear. Oh, let's do it, because their livestock and all their property will become ours. It's a route to riches. And that still happens today too, doesn't it? Somebody will change their religion outwardly in order to marry the person that they want to marry sometimes. Some will seek baptism in the Christian church, for example, because, well, it will help their claim to asylum in this country.

That happens too, doesn't it? In amongst the genuine claims, there are always those who will use religious things perversely. They mustn't be naive. Religious hypocrisy abounds on every side today, just as it did here.

[37 : 58] And Hamor and Shechem are equally deceitful. You see that. They sell this scheme to their own people perfectly falsely. They don't tell them anything about the real reason. And here, John Calvin is absolutely right when he says that those of ranks so often feign consideration for the common good and public advantage, when in fact, they're really just serving their own ends.

Well, bankers, bureaucrats, corrupt politicians, nothing changes. But surely the point here is that in the name of honor and distinctive holiness, the brothers resort to the very same dishonor that shows them to be utterly indistinct from these pagans round about them.

they become defiled in their thinking just as much as their sister Dinah has become defiled in the flesh. And that's why this chapter ends with an account of the shocking pillaging of the city that brings disgrace on the name of Israel, verses 25 to the end.

Just as the shameful passion had brought defilement to Israel, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's true brothers, they led the assault on Shechem, verse 25, when it felt secure.

And they butchered these unsuspecting people, unarmed and shocking. And it's so shocking the writer doesn't have to elaborate or even comment.

[39 : 28] It's murder in cold blood. And then it's followed by looting and plundering of the dead bodies. It's terrible. It's a hideous business. Absolutely nobody in this comes out well.

Not the brothers, not Dinah, and nor Jacob, because although in verse 30 here he condemns their action, he is as culpable as they, because he was the one who failed to show any concern for his daughter.

He's the one who failed to act so that the brothers took the initiative from him. And I think it's significant that the last word in verse 31 goes to the sons, and it stands as a rebuke to Jacob.

William still is right, I think, when he says that their motive, the sons, is more righteous than their fathers, albeit their revenge is out of all proportion.

But it's a sordid and a shocking and a savage business. Very much like the real world. Look at the pictures coming out of Syria today.

[40 : 31] And it brings this grace and opprobrium on the Israelites, as Jacob laments, although in verse 30 you can see he seems to be rather pitifully self-preoccupied.

A far, far cry from the wrestler with God that we saw just a little while ago at Peniel. And that just reminds us, doesn't it, or ought to, that no great spiritual experience will ever free us from the ongoing battles with sin and our sinful natures, however wonderful it might be.

Jacob hasn't become suddenly fully sanctified. It's a sordid business. And yet there is a sense, isn't there, in which the Hivites also meet their judgment at God's hand.

They're far from innocent in all of this. I think the text is pointing that out to us in the way that the same verbs are used at the beginning, at the end of the chapter. Shechem, we're told, took Dinah and abused her.

He tried to take her for his wife. And here in verse 25, Dinah's brothers took the sword and took Dinah, verse 26, and took the flocks of the Shechemites, verse 28.

[41 : 46] In a very real sense, they also reaped what they sowed, because God is not mocked. And unrepentant evil will be punished and judged.

Does that mean, though, that we could say that Levi and Simeon somehow were heroes of this story because of that? Could they be right to act as avengers of God on this evil, as some think? No, I don't think so. There can be no doubt in this chapter they are not condoned for their action. If you read later on in Genesis chapter 49, you'll see that they're disqualified from their proper blessing from God because of this action.

They're cursed because of their cruel anger and their wrath. Hang on, you might say, doesn't God command this very kind of slaughter of the Canaanites later on in the scripture?

Isn't the Old Testament, in fact, full of indiscriminate butchery like this? The answer is no, it's not. Yes, there are indeed some occasions when God does command his people to be a sword of judgment upon evil, principally during the conquest of Canaan later on under Joshua.

[43 : 08] But as Abraham was told by God back in Genesis 15, that was a long-awaited judgment on God for their sin. And if you read, for example, Deuteronomy chapter 2 and 3, you will see how often God tells his people not to go to war with this people or that or the other or so on.

They can only do that at his specific command. And those occasions are very few. And here, there was no such command to holy war, nor has there been any such command since those times.

And nor shall there be ever for the church of Jesus Christ today. not because such judgment is a barbarous relic of the Old Testament.

No! The Lord Jesus Christ is clearer than any that these judgments will be as nothing in comparison to the great judgment of all peoples at his coming.

Not because there is no judgment, but because in his great mercy, he has deferred that judgment.

[44 : 20] He has decreed a day of grace, a day of salvation, when God's people carry a very different kind of sword, the sword of the gospel that brings people to captivity in Christ to find his saving mercy.

And our place, therefore, can never be to be avengers against the godless society. That was the terrible, mistaken folly of the crusades.

Just to starve.