





Revenge at Shechem – Genesis 34

GENESIS 34:1-24

The details of this chapter offer us insight into the nature of God's promises and the seriousness with which they should be treated. The symbolism behind it invites us to examine the true meaning of commitment in the light of God's word.

As you are reading, keep in mind that Dinah, whose name means "vindicated" or "judged" in Hebrew, points to the concepts of judgment and vindication that surround her.

In this chapter, Shechem's intent to marry Dinah is a misguided attempt to align with Jacob's family, as he seeks a form of vindication through association. His desire for Dinah and his willingness to undergo circumcision, as per the demand of Jacob's sons, can be seen as an external conformity to the practices of the Israelites. The true covenantal relationship God desires, goes deeper than merely external rites.

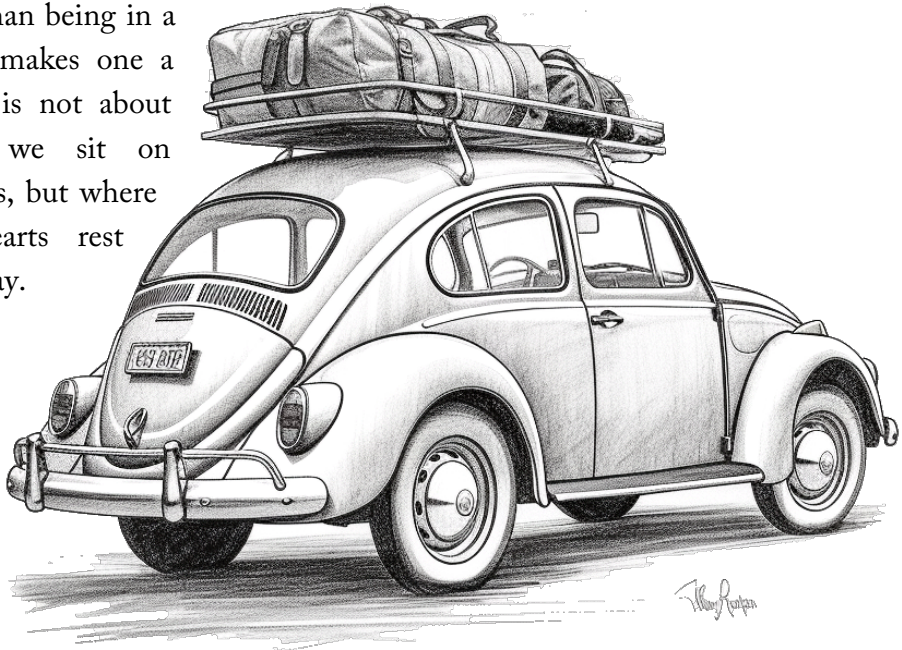
Circumcision was a sign of the Abrahamic covenant, a symbol of being set apart for God. In Genesis 17:10-11, we read, "This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every

male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you."

Paul addresses this deeper aspect of circumcision in the New Testament. In Romans 2:28-29, he writes, "A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God."

This outward sign of the covenant was meant to be accompanied by faith and obedience. The essence of circumcision, or the symbolism behind it, is the cutting away of the flesh, fulfilled in Christ, who brings about a transformation of the heart, not just adherence to external rituals.

Shechem's desire to unite with Jacob's family symbolizes a superficial approach to a relationship with God. It echoes the attitude of those who yearn for the perks of being aligned with Christianity—the hope and security it offers—without experiencing a sincere conversion. Just as Shechem saw a marriage to Dinah as a shortcut to the blessings of Abraham's descendants, many today view external religious acts as a shortcut to salvation. Being in church doesn't make one a Christian any more than being in a garage makes one a car. It is not about where we sit on Sundays, but where our hearts rest every day.



True Christianity involves an inward change—a daily walk and a personal relationship with God that shapes our values, our thoughts and our very lives. It's about living out the principles of Christ's teachings, not just professing them within the four walls of a church building. True faith is more than aspiration; it's dedication to living a life that reflects the teachings and character of Christ, which goes beyond mere outward displays or ritualistic observance.

True vindication comes through faith in Jesus Christ, as He is the one who justifies and redeems us. Dinah's name thus serves as a prophetic marker in the narrative, pointing towards the ultimate vindication that comes from God alone, not through human attempts at righteousness or affiliation.

❓ What does the cutting away of the flesh through circumcision symbolize?

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❓ What does Paul's understanding of circumcision (Romans 2:28-29) as a matter of the heart tell us about the motives of the brothers in this chapter?

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❓ How does Shechem's approach to a relationship with Jacob's family reflect the idea of empty religion?

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GENESIS 34:25-31

The story of Dinah and the retaliation by her brothers, Simeon and Levi illustrates the dangerous consequences of unbridled anger and taking justice into our own hands without seeking God's guidance. This passage compels us to examine how we handle our anger to ensure that our response aligns with God's will, rather than our own reckless judgments.

Ephesians 4:26-27 tells us, "In your anger do not sin: do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." These boundaries serve as a guide for managing anger. It's a reminder that although anger is a natural human emotion, it's not a license to sin. We must approach our anger prayerfully, seeking the right course of action that upholds integrity, mercy, and ultimately reflects God's character.

God fully understands the complexities of our hearts. He's acquainted with our struggles and the triggers that provoke our anger. He knows we'll be angry at times, but we must differentiate between righteous anger and human wrath. Not all anger is righteous; at times, it stems from self-centered motives, impatience, hurt, or we're simply unreasonable.

The key is discernment—recognizing when our anger is justified and when it's giving the devil a foothold. If we open the door, yielding to raw emotions without restraint, he's sure to step in. If you entertain those emotions, he'll start unpacking his bags.

It's not just what we do with our anger that we need to consider, it's also where our anger stems from. Is it fueled by a godly desire for justice, or by a personal vendetta? Is it in harmony with God's will or driven by the flesh? A good rule of thumb is to temper our reactions with the fruits of the Spirit—gentleness, patience, kindness—attributes that define God's way, not ours.



If we discover that our anger is misguided, we must be humble enough to soften our hearts and alter our thoughts, steering them towards compassion and understanding. This transformation is not always simple, but with earnest prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is within our reach.

Looking at Genesis chapter 34, we're reminded to be smart about how we handle anger. If we're not careful, it can overtake us and lead us to sin—just look at what happened with Jacob's family. We should aim to deal with our anger in ways that are respectful to God, showing His goodness and rightness in how we live.

Jacob's distress in Genesis 34:30, "You have brought trouble on me by making me obnoxious to the Canaanites and Perizzites," reminds us that sin leaves a trail. When we act out of anger without considering the broader impact, we compromise our witness as children of God. When our behavior is at odds with His teachings, it damages our effectiveness in sharing His love and truth with others. In other words, our choices don't just affect our

lives, they also affect the way the world views the character of God through us. And so, it's essential to live in a way that honors Him and upholds the integrity of our witness.

As a side note, in Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus provides instructions on how to handle transgressions within the church: "If your brother or sister sins against you, go to them. Tell them what they did wrong. Keep it between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them back. But what if they won't listen to you? Then take one or two others with you. Scripture says, 'Every matter must be proved by the words of two or



three witnesses.’ (Deuteronomy 19:15) But what if they also refuse to listen to the witnesses? Then tell it to the church. And what if they refuse to listen even to the church? Then don’t treat them as a brother or sister. Treat them as you would treat an ungodly person or a tax collector.”

With this in mind, it's important to note that while these steps are valuable for addressing conflicts within the church community, there are situations where immediate action is necessary, especially in cases of serious crimes such as rape. In such instances, reporting the crime to the authorities is essential for the safety and well-being of all involved. Going to the perpetrator privately could put you in danger and hinder the pursuit of justice.

Additionally, when dealing with transgressions outside the church, we must remember that while we leave ultimate justice in the hands of the Lord, there are times when crimes should be reported, and boundaries should be set for our safety. It's crucial to seek guidance from trusted individuals, including legal authorities, and to prioritize our own safety and the safety of others.

❓ What are the two boundaries we find in Ephesians 4:26-27 in regard to controlling our anger?

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Can you think of a time when you reacted with uncontrolled anger? Looking back on that experience, what do you wish you had done differently in terms of your attitude or actions?

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Romans 12:19 says, "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." How does this principle shape your approach to seeking justice and responding to wrongdoing?

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I WILL GIVE YOU A NEW HEART AND PUT A NEW
SPIRIT IN YOU; I WILL REMOVE FROM YOU YOUR
HEART OF STONE AND GIVE YOU A HEART OF FLESH.

EZEKIEL 36:26, NIV

Answer Key

Chapter 10 – Genesis 34

GENESIS 34:1-24

What does the cutting away of the flesh through circumcision symbolize?

It's an outward sign of an inward commitment to forsake sin and live in purity before God. In other words, it symbolizes the cutting away of sin.

What does Paul's understanding of circumcision (Romans 2:28-29) as a matter of the heart tell us about the motives of the brothers in this chapter?

This manipulation of using something holy for personal vengeance directly contradicts the spiritual essence of circumcision. Paul teaches that true circumcision is a matter of the heart, focusing on inward transformation rather than merely an external one. By insisting that the men be circumcised in order to unite with their family, they were dishonoring the covenant and God's intent behind it.

How does Shechem's approach to a relationship with Jacob's family reflect the idea of empty religion?

He viewed circumcision merely as a means to gain Dinah and form alliances, rather than as a sacred commitment to God's ways (Genesis 34:18-24). This mirrors the concept of empty religion, where outward rituals are performed not out of genuine faith or repentance, but as a transactional or superficial adherence to religious norms.

GENESIS 34:25-31

What are the two boundaries we find in Ephesians 4:26-27 in regard to controlling our anger?

First, he instructs, "In your anger do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26 NIV), emphasizing the boundary that while anger itself is not inherently sinful, it must not lead to sinful behavior.

The second boundary is temporal: "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" (Ephesians 4:26 NIV), urging us to resolve disputes quickly and not allow anger to fester, which can lead to bitterness and give the devil a foothold (Ephesians 4:27).

Can you think of a time when you reacted with uncontrolled anger? Looking back on that experience, what do you wish you had done differently in terms of your attitude or actions?

(This answer will be different for everyone)

Romans 12:19 says, "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." How does this principle shape your approach to seeking justice and responding to wrongdoing?

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