Unquenchable Promise

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 August 2017

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0:00] a half year or so, and we're now in chapter 34. And what happened at the end of chapter 33 is we saw Jacob finally be reconciled to his twin brother and rival, Esau, and purchased a lot of land in the city of Shechem.

And Shechem is in the land of Canaan, so this seems to be an auspicious beginning for him, his return to Canaan, because the promise of God that he would inherit the land of Canaan seems to be getting fulfilled. Now, as that's happening, however, as it happens throughout the book of Genesis, a big threat arises, and right now what we're reading about here is perhaps the most dramatic threat we've seen up to this point to that potential fulfillment of Jacob's promise.
And while he's dealing with his fear and uncertainty in that situation, we learn from him and his example that we should not compromise our exclusive devotion to God because he is the one who keeps his promise.
He's the God who's faithful to keep his promises. And we're going to learn that through two main points. And the first is we're going to look at the promise threatened in chapter 34, and then we're going to look at the promise renewed in chapter 35 and following.
And 34.1, it begins, Now, Dinah, the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the woman of the land.
[1:25] Now, that sounds innocent at first glance, but there is more going on under the surface because the first word of the sentence is really awkward. The verb went out is the very first word of the sentence.

And people, the Hebrew writers, do that for emphasis. They front the word that they want to emphasize. So he says, went out, Dinah, the daughter of Leah. And why is that emphasized? Because here in this passage, the verb went out occurs four times in just in chapter 34.
And every time it represents a crossing of ethno-religious boundary, kind of a social boundary, right? So first time is when Dinah goes out, went out to see the woman of the land, to see the woman of Canaan.
And later in verse 6, Hamor, the father of Shechem, went out to Jacob to speak to them. And then in verse 24, all who went out of the gate of the city were circumcised, meaning all the able-bodied men who would typically go out of the city gate to represent their city in battle with other nations and cities.
So these, they went out to cross, again, another social boundary. And then finally, in verse 26, it says that Simeon and Levi killed Hamor and Shechem and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went away.
[2:40] Again, same word, leaving that social, that ethno-cultural boundary. So each time the word is used, it refers to a crossing of a boundary, social-religious boundary.

And that implies that Dinah is here crossing over, transgressing a boundary that she probably should not be crossing given the context of Genesis. This is confirmed by the fact that the only other occurrence of the phrase, woman of the land, right, is in the book of Genesis.
The whole book is in Genesis 27, 46, where Rebecca says to Isaac, I loathe my life because of the Hittite woman, if Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land, that's the same phrase, then what good will my life be to me?
So all the patriarchs of Genesis have up to this point have shown great concern with preserving their faith and allegiance to God by refusing to intermarry with the Canaanites, right?
And so, because they could potentially lead them astray, lead them to idolatry. So the fact that Dinah here goes out, right, to consort with the woman of the land is not an innocent comment.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-16 03:04:33

[3:45] So in verse 1 to begin. So Dinah goes out to check out the social scene among the woman of the land, and while she is out to sea, it says, that she is herself seen by a man of the land.

In verse 2, 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. Note the parallel repetition of the phrase, of the land, right? Dinah consorts with the woman of the land and is caught by the prince of the land. And what Shechem does here is unequivocally condemned by the narrator. And we know that because of the phrase, he saw her and seized her.
Now, the word seize here is an over-translation. So it's actually just the same generic word for take that is used all throughout Genesis. It doesn't say seize. It doesn't imply violence or force.
It just says take. Now, but when you translate it that way, it says saw her and took her. That raises up a lot of interesting parallels in the book of Genesis. Because the very first time when someone is said to saw, and they saw and took, it was at the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3, 6.
[4:53] When Eve saw that the tree of knowledge of good and evil was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. So the first sin of humanity was described that way, saw and took.

And then the second time that happened was that someone saw and took was what precipitated the flood judgment over all the earth, right? So it's when the angels of God, the sons of God, saw that the daughters of men were attractive, and they took as their wives any they chose, right?
Genesis 6, 2. And then there's other times, and it's all kind of similar sins. So Genesis 12, 15. The prince of Pharaoh saw Sarai, Abram's wife, and took her into his house. And it describes Leah's unfaithfulness as well later in Genesis 39.
When she saw that she had seized bearing children and took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. So the two verbs, when they're paired together throughout Genesis, always refers to sin, transgressing of a boundary that God has placed for our good.
So what boundary exactly did Shechem cross here, transgress? And many biblical scholars see this as an instance of rape. And this particular translation certainly sends that impression, the way it's translated.
[6:07] And that's the assumption that I, too, brought to this text as I was preparing this sermon this week, and wrote like three pages of sermons, worth of sermons.

And then as I was studying more of it, I realized I don't think this is actually rape. And I'll explain in a second why that's the case. First, the word I mentioned to you, take, is just a generic word for take. It's not cease. And that's the typical word that is used to describe a man taking a wife throughout Genesis. Over and over again, you find so-and-so took so-and-so as a wife.
Over and over again throughout Genesis. Now, and then in, so to give you an example of this, a specific example, Genesis 38, 2, it says that Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua.
He took her and went into her. It's the same word for take. But there's no indication whatsoever there that there was something inappropriate going on because it just says took, right?
[7:02] And in fact, it implies that the woman became his wife and she bears three children for him. And then in Deuteronomy, also written by the same author, 22, 23, 29, it delineates specific laws governing sexual relations.

And in those case laws that's in Deuteronomy, it specifically distinguishes rape from just premarital sex, fornication, right? And there is a specific Hebrew word that is used to mean seize forcibly, right?
To be strong over someone. And that's the word that the Hebrew uses to imply rape. That's the word that is used to describe Emnon's rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel 12, for example.
And that's the word that's used to refer to the rape of the widow or the wife of the man from Gibeah. So that's the word that's used, but that word is curiously not used here.
It uses just a generic word for take. It doesn't say seized forcibly. Second, and in verse 2, it says that Shechem humiliated her.
[8:13] And this also is the word that is typically used to describe fornication and all kinds of sex outside of marriage and not specifically sexual abuse. So for example, in Deuteronomy 22, 23 to 29, a betrothed woman who consensually sleeps with another man and thereby commits adultery, as well as an unbetrothed woman who consensually sleeps with a man thereby committing fornication are both said to have been humiliated.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-16 03:04:33

Exactly the same word. So the third final thing, the word defile that's used to describe Dinah, which is used three times, verse 5, verse 13, verse 27.
It also refers generically to uncleanness and inappropriateness and not specifically to sexual abuse or violation. So example, Deuteronomy 24, 4, a woman who is legally divorced from her husband and then marries another man and then is legally divorced again from her second husband.
It says she is defiled and therefore cannot go back to marry the first ex-husband, right? Even though they were all consensual relationships. It has nothing to do with rape or abuse.
It's an inappropriate relationship. All kinds of inappropriate sexual relations were defiled. It's considered defiling. And so Shechem and Dinah certainly have transgressed a divinely ordained boundary, but that boundary is not that he forced her to have sex with her, but that they crossed the boundary that God had tried to put a hedge around, hedge of protection around intercourse, around intimacy, so that it happens in the trusting context and commitment of marriage under the covenant of God, but they violated that by having sex outside of marriage.
[9:54] So that's one way in which defilement and humiliation occurred. And the second thing is that Dinah did this with a member outside of her religious group. That's, again, another thing that leads to her defiling and humiliation.

And so this interpretation makes better sense of the whole passage as a whole because later when the narrator comments on this episode in verse 7, he says, 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.
What is the outrageous thing, right, that he's come to? It's not outrageous that Shechem forced Dinah into having sexual relations. What's outrageous is that he did a thing in Israel with Jacob's daughter, right?
That's what's emphasized by the narrator, right? So that seems to me like, okay, that's why they're concerned for her humiliation and defilement. And finally, at the end in verse 31, after they take their bloody vengeance, Simeon and Levi, they say, Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?
There's another clue because a prostitute is not raped, right? A prostitute is paid for consensual sex. And what they're accusing him of is you, instead of taking her into marriage and having a proper relationship with her, you slept with her, and now you're bringing, after the fact, a bright price as a payment.
[11:28] So that's what they're saying. You're treating our sister like a prostitute, right? So I think that's, I mean, that's, I think this affects the way we understand the passage.

It's still, I think, the main point of passage remains the same. So, I mean, if you guys are skeptical, I totally understand because I was skeptical of it myself as I was studying it all week. But that is, when we recognize that Shechem had a committed fornication with Dinah rather than raping her, then Shechem's response afterward also actually makes a lot more sense.
Because look at verse 3. And his soul was drawn to Dinah, the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. His soul was drawn to Dinah.
So the word drawn here is the same word that is used in Genesis 2.24, where it gives a vision for Christian marriage. It says, therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife.
That's the same word, you know, drawn. So even though he sinned, Shechem, now after the fact, is feeling exactly the right kind of bond that he's supposed to feel, that a spouse is supposed to feel.
[12:35] And then it says he loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. That literally translates to speak over the heart. So it's the reassuring, comforting word that he's speaking to her.

And so Shechem is genuinely infatuated with Dinah. And even though he sinned by sleeping with her before marrying her, he now wants to do the right thing by marrying Dinah and committing to a loving relationship with her.
And this is not the reason why I think this argument is compelling, but it's also confirmed by social research, right? So in an article published by UCLA in the Journal of Social Sciences, Dr. Neil Malamuth writes about how men who had raped women, had a tendency to rape women, have a hostile adversarial relationship with women in general.
So for them, the rape is not merely about sex. It's not about gratification, but about control and conquest. And it's frequently vindictive.
So generally what happens after a rape is that the rapist feels hostility and hatred toward the victim, not love and attachment. And that's actually exactly what you find in the case of rape in 2 Samuel

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-16 03:04:33

13, 13 to 17.
[13:47] When Amnon rapes Tamar, it says afterward, Amnon hated her with very great hatred so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her, right?

So that's what you would expect. But instead, what you find here is Shechem is drawn to her and loves her and cares for her. So Shechem is kind of a complicated character.
So he's not a one-dimensional character. He's a complex character. He's a sinner, clearly, but he also loves Dinah. And then he speaks tenderly to Dinah, but he speaks incredibly rudely to his father.
So in verse 4, get me this girl for my wife. Now that's a command, right? It's abrupt. There's no please. And so when they finally come to speak to Jacob in verse 5, it tells us how Jacob responded.
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. So Jacob is undoubtedly upset, but he keeps his cool for the time being because his sons are out of the house.
[14:50] So he seems that he didn't want to start a confrontation that could spiral out of control without his sons there to back him up. So Jacob waits. And when everyone's gathered, Hamor, the father of Shechem, makes this offer.

And notice he doesn't apologize for anything, right? If his son had raped Jacob's daughter, you would expect some kind of apology because the way the Hebrew Bible looks at rape, it considers it exactly the same as murder.
It says in Deuteronomy 22. So he says, And the word for property here is the same word that is translated possession in Genesis 17, 8 and 48, 4, where God promises to Abraham and his descendants the land of Canaan as their possession, everlasting possession.
So the fact that Canaanites here are offering them possession of the land, it's very appealing. If you're Jacob, you've been waiting for a long time for this to be fulfilled, right? So he's saying, maybe this is finally the way in which this will happen.
But of course, the offer doesn't just come with the carrot, it comes with the trap. And it also requires that they intermarry and settle among the Canaanites with them, even though that is explicitly forbidden in later Mosaic law, right?
[16:21] So Exodus 34, 13 to 16, Don't take the daughters of Canaanites for your sons, lest their daughters whore after their gods, and make your sons whore after their gods, right? So to intermarry with them risk apostasy, lack of faithfulness to God.

And so that's why here we find Jacob and his sons in a great bind under the dilemma. And so Jacob can't simply accept this offer, and his sons respond in verses 14 to 17, 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. 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. So for Hamer and Shechem, the only problem with Shechem and Dinah's illicit relationship is that they're not yet married.
So they come to solve that problem by offering a bride price and get them to marry. But for Jacob and his sons, that's not the only problem. There's another problem, and that's that they belong to a different religious ethnic group.
[17:38] They don't worship the Lord God that they serve. And so because of that, even though the Shechemites are offering a great, they are highlighting the economic advantages of this intermarriage, the sons of Jacob highlight the religious disadvantages of intermarrying with them.

And so in verse 13, it says, but so everything that the sons are saying here are true. I mean, they're saying it would be a disgrace for us to intermarry with the uncircumcised people. But they're not saying it sincerely because their intention is simply to deceive them, it says in verse 13.
The circumcision was a ruse designed to incapacitate the men of Shechem so that they could raid them and ransack the city. So not knowing this, obviously, Hamer and Shechem used their political clout to influence all the men of Shechem.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-16 03:04:33

And they are saying it's a really interesting study in human psychology because they know how to cajole people into doing things that they want because when they come to talk to them, they don't mention anything about their personal stake in this, right?
And the whole driving force of this transaction is that Shechem wants to marry Dinah, but they mention nothing of that. But they say, oh, but look, all their stuff is going to be ours, right?
[18:50] You're going to be rich once these people settle with us. So that's what they say. And that's also a contradiction of what they promised to Jacob and his sons because he promised them, you get property in our midst, but now he tells his own people that we're going to get their property for ourselves.

So he's not being entirely forthright with either of them. And John Calvin's comment about this is incisive, very telling, a comment about the human psychology.
It says, Hamer and Shechem then enumerate other advantages. Meanwhile, they cunningly conceal the private and real cause of their request, whence it follows that all these pretexts are fallacious.
But it is a very common disease that men of rank who have great authority, while making all things subservient to their own private ends, feign themselves to be considered for the common good and pretend a desire for the public advantage.
Ouch. So that's what's going on here. And nonetheless, their pitch is accepted, and all able-bodied men are circumcised.
[19:53] And it's ironic because they tell themselves that these people are at peace with them all the while they're planning this raid. And it says in verse 25, Nowadays, a lot of men are not circumcised.

And even the men who are circumcised were probably circumcised when they were babies or infants, so they don't know what it's like to circumcise as a grown man. But when you're circumcised as a grown man, it's incapacitating for weeks.
So, I mean, they can't fight. They can't even walk properly. And Levi and Simeon surely take advantage of that and raid the house. So as they do that, there is kind of an eye-for-eye principle at work, in the sense that they took Dinah, that's the same word, and now it says Levi and Simeon, they take Dinah out of Shechem's house in verse 26.
So they're kind of returning what they did to them. But then they go beyond that because the word take is used multiple times to refer to all the other stuff that they take. They don't just take Dinah back.
It says they also took the sword, right? And then they killed all the people, killed all the men in the city. And it says that they also took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys and whatever was in the city and in the field.
[21:17] And it says in verse 29, all their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all this was in the houses. All that was in the houses they captured and plundered.

So this is a despicable act that they're doing. They're taking, this is not justice. They're taking vengeance into their own hands. And what they're doing is widely disproportionate.
It's not just. And so Jacob, who was apparently not privy to what Simeon and Levi were planning on doing, rebukes them in verse 30. 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. So that's the threat, the promise threatened.
So not long after Jacob's return to the land of Canaan, the promise that God had made to Jacob appears to be in jeopardy. Not merely because the Canaanites might now be out to get them, but also because of the raid that they conducted and all the idols potentially that they have accumulated for themselves and with all the women and the children that they took.
[22:27] But whenever this happens in the book of Genesis, God graciously intervenes for his people. And that leads us to our second point, promise renewed. God says to Jacob in chapter 35, verse 1, 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. This is a kind reminder from God of the other time that when he delivered Jacob from a mortal threat from his brother Esau.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-16 03:04:33

And this is an allusion. That's what God says here to the promise that God made to Jacob in chapter 28, 13 to 16. When Jacob was first leaving Canaan, God promised to Jacob, I will be with you and keep you, protect you, and I will bring you back to this land.
And then Jacob responded by making a vow, If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God.
And this stone which I have set up for a pillar shall be God's house. And of all that you give me, I will give a full tent to you. So this is a vow that Jacob had made. And throughout this narrative, God has faithfully kept his end of the bargain.
[23:37] He has protected him. He has given him clothes, enriched him, and now he has brought him back to the land of Canaan. So we're waiting as readers to see if Jacob will actually fulfill his vow.

And that's what God's calling him to do here. But interestingly enough, this happens at a time when Jacob would be most reluctant to venture out into further into the land of Canaan, to go to Bethel, because he thinks there are people, all the Canaanites are going to gather and kill off his entire household.
But it's that moment when his faith is most needed, God calls him, Go now, arise, and go and worship me in Bethel. And Jacob responds promptly.
He obeys. And sensing that his vow to have the Lord be his God is inconsistent with all the household idols that were in their possession, he calls for a purge of this in verses 2 to 3.
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.
[24:47] So if you guys remember from chapter 31, remember Rachel stole a household god from her father, Laban, when she left with Jacob, her husband. So there's probably household gods from that.

But there's also likely household gods from Shechem because he says that they took all that was in the houses and they were pagan nations. They worshiped idols. And so that's why he calls for a purge.
He says, Wash yourself and change your garments, so that represents a new way of life, a purified way of life. And then it's only then they can arise and go up to Bethel, which is a language of pilgrimage.
Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord, right? Who has clean hands and a pure heart, right? So that's what they're doing, purifying themselves so they can go up and worship him. Jacob's family members also promptly obey Jacob's call.
And so he says, So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebin tree that was near Shechem. It's not exactly clear why they also take their rings off.
[25:50] They take the gods, but they also take their rings off. It might be that later in the Pentateuch, like in Exodus 32, 2-4, Israelites take their rings and melt it and forge an idol out of it.

So it may be expressing a total commitment, saying we will never return to these gods at all. And so we're even getting rid of the ways which we can make these idols. It could also be a way of bringing an offering.
So there's an example of that in Numbers 31, where after a raid of the Midianites, Israelites offer the plunder that they have to God as an offering. So anyway, in this episode, that they're going through a purification of the defiling that happened, not just of Dinah, but also through the raid of Simeon and Levi of the town of Shechem.
And in this, we learn that we as people, God's people should not compromise our exclusive devotion to God because He is the one who is faithful to keep His promises.
And because if God has promised it, then He will fulfill it, and then we don't have to resort to our own devices or compromise our devotion and obedience to God. So Israel was not supposed to become one people with Canaan, right?
[27:00] Shechem was not the man that God had chosen through which the nations and Israel will be united. And for that reason, and because Israel had to preserve its line from whom the Messiah would come, the Jesus Christ would come, they had to be faithful to Him.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-16 03:04:33

And this is confirmed. I won't really speak too much about Genesis 36, which tells us about the genealogy of Esau. But the main point from that is the fact that Esau, you know, Esau left the land of Canaan, the land of promise, and he intermarried with Canaanites.
And so that's set up there in Genesis 36 as a contrast to Jacob in Genesis 35. So it says 36, 1 to 2, These are the generations of Esau, that is Edom. Esau took his wives from the Canaanites.
And then later in 36, 6, 8, it says, Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the members of his household, his livestock, all his beasts, and all his property that he had acquired in the land of Canaan. And he went into a land away from his brother Jacob, for their possessions were too great for them to dwell together.
The land of their sojournings could not support them because of their livestock. So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir. Esau is Edom. And that's contrasted with 37, 1, which said that Jacob remained in the land of his sojourning.
[28:21] Jacob remains a sojourner in the land of promise because he's holding on to the promise of God that God will give him this land. Esau forsakes that promise. He leaves the land of Canaan and intermarries with the Canaanites.

And that's given to us as an example so that we should not compromise our exclusive devotion to God because God is faithful to fulfill his promises.
And I want to just ask you, just for a way of application, what are the ways in which, you know, you are tempted to settle and compromise with the ways of this world, with the ways of Shechem?
Maybe, I'm just thinking about some examples, maybe you, like Shechem, are tempted by promiscuity, pornography, premarital sex. Everyone else seems to be doing it, right?
Maybe there's a TV show you watch or a musician you listen to that does not fill your mind with whatever is true and whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is lovely, whatever is excellent and praiseworthy.
[29:26] Instead, it fills your mind with violence, lust, crudeness, pride, cynicism, unbelief. Maybe your speech is not always gracious, seasoned with salt, as it says in Colossians 4.6.

Instead, it's rash and presumptuous, puffed up with pride, sharp with anger, cutting down instead of building up. Maybe there's a biblical teaching that you know of that is particularly unpopular in our culture this day and age.
And instead of holding fast to it, you're beginning to slip, sliding closer and closer to the world in order to be more relevant and accepted. We must not compromise our exclusive devotion to God because He is faithful to fulfill His promises.
His words are true and His words are good for us. What are the idols in your life that you have been hiding? Maybe like Rachel and the other servants in the household of Jacob.
You worship the true God, yes, but you say to yourself, maybe, well, it's nice to hold on to some of these things as an insurance policy, maybe not consciously, but subconsciously. What competes with God in your life for your affection and trust?
[30:49] Maybe you struggle with idleness and distraction. You retreat to mindless scrolling and surfing to get away from the responsibilities and demands of this life instead of finding your true rest in God.

Maybe the opposite is true for you. You're constantly busy. You're struggling with perpetual business not because your schedule is busy, but because your heart is busy.
You're trying to find fulfillment in something other than God. Maybe you're trusting in wealth, how much money you've saved up that makes you feel secure.
Maybe you're trusting your boyfriend or girlfriend or husband or wife or just your best friend and you're looking to them to fulfill and satisfy longing in you that only God can fulfill.
maybe if you're a believer, you're becoming legalistic. You're trusting in your own diligence and your own law keeping.
[31:53] Striving to be good enough to earn God's favor so you can make the cut. That too is an idol because ultimately you're relying on yourself not on God who saves.

We must not compromise our exclusive devotion to God because He who promised is faithful. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you as well. Trust in Christ and His sufficiency for you today and let's daily as God's people take inventory of our lives to purify ourselves as Jacob's household has done. And so after Jacob's household purified themselves, God acts decisively on their behalf and He strikes the Canaanite population with fear.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-16 03:04:33

It says in verse 5, and as they journey, notice this happens, as they are journeying and stepping out in faith to what God has called them to do, as they do that, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.
So though Jacob and his sons were afraid of the Canaanites, it's the Canaanites who are struck with divine terror and fear. And then God appears to Jacob again to reaffirm the new name he gave him earlier in chapter 32, 20, it's saying this, your name shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.
[33:16] It's a really powerful name change because the new name Israel is a combination of the Hebrew word for God and the Hebrew word for strive or struggle, right? So it means God struggles or God strives, right?

And Jacob in that episode in chapter 32, his name was played, it was a word played on the place name Yabok which also means struggle.
Yaakov, Yabok, there's a, it sounds, it looks very similar. So Jacob's name was also played along with the word, a different Hebrew word that also means struggle or strive. So the name change is, this is what's happening.
So Jacob is the heel grabber, right? He's the deceiver, he's the usurper, but now he becomes Israel, the rightful heir to God's covenantal promises. His name was Jacob, the wrestler, right? The, the struggler, the striver, always striving for himself, grasping to advance himself. But now, his name becomes Israel, meaning God will contend for him. God will strive for him.
[34:17] And that's a powerful name change, and that's God's taking is the, and Jacob and redeeming him, saying to him, I will be your God. Now, this doesn't mean from this point on of Jacob's life, everything goes smoothly, and he doesn't struggle and doesn't experience any sorrows.

It's, that's contradicted just in this, the rest of chapter 35. Jacob loses his beloved wife, Rachel, right? And Rachel had earlier said to Jacob, give me children or I shall die.
And ironically, it's in giving birth to children that she dies. But nevertheless, he who promised is faithful, and God's promise of progeny continues to be fulfilled.
And God answers, Rachel's prayer for another son by giving her Benjamin. And then still later in 35, 22, Jacob's oldest son, Reuben, sleeps with his father's concubine.
This is not just a sensual act, it's a power-grabbing act because he's assuming and asserting authority over his father by doing that, right? And so, he's trying to assert his firstborn rights.
[35:21] Perhaps he was a little bit afraid because he's the firstborn son, but he's the son of Leah, not the son of the favored wife, Rachel, so maybe he thought he would lose his firstborn rights, but it's actually in his presumption and sinful act of sleeping with his dad's concubine that he will actually lose his firstborn's rights.

And in spite of all of this, through all these sinful children and all the division that they're experiencing because of Jacob's sinful polygamous marriage, God's plans still go forward.
So Jacob's life is still full of brokenness, suffering, and grief, and sorrow, but God, who promised, is faithful, and we see that his promises advance in an ineluctable way.
The promise of multitude of descendants is being fulfilled, and Jacob's final return to Mamre, where most of the promises that God had made to Abraham was, and where Abraham first got to own property in Canaan.
That's, again, a reminder of the fact that God's promises to Jacob are being fulfilled, which is great for storytelling purposes, but why do we care? Why do we care about Jacob?
[36:32] Because ultimately, Jacob is a small, insignificant man, right? His life is streaked with sins and sorrows, and you won't find any story about him in our history books in schools, so why do we learn about him?

And the reason why he figures prominently here in the Bible is because God, in his sovereign grace, chose to use the people of Israel to bring forth Jesus Christ, who in turn will save not just Israel, but all the nations by reconciling them to himself.
It's for that purpose. So this is not parochial. This is not ethnic, you know, ethnocentrism. This is God's plan. His sovereignly chosen plan through which he will bring redemption to all nations, and it is that reason why that Jacob has to be so concerned about fidelity and faithfulness and preserving the faith of his household.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-16 03:04:33

And later, when Jesus does come, Paul speaks about what Jesus did, and he addresses Gentiles, the non-Jews, in Ephesians 2, 11 to 16. Therefore, remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands.
Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.
[37:55] But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ, for he himself is our peace who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by reconciling us both to God in one body through the cross.

It's when we truly believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, died for our sins and rose again from the dead. And it's when we, in that faith and in accordance with that faith, are baptized, which signifies our union, our identification with the death and resurrection of Christ.
That's when we can be assured of this. Then we are born again into the family of God and into the nation of spiritual Israel, the new Israel which is in Jesus. Then we no longer also, like Jacob, have to contend for ourselves.
We don't have to strive for ourselves to save ourselves. There are people I see every week, right, and during the week, I meet believers all the time who are striving so hard but down on themselves and plagued by guilt and giving up on what it means to be a Christian in life, giving up on sanctification because they're trying to do it in their own strength when the strength for sanctification, strength for growth comes only through Jesus Christ and His power.
And it's when we believe that and when we become Christians, we no longer have to contend for ourselves because God contends for us. He strives for us. Jesus earned our righteousness for us. And we no longer have to be our own saviors and lords.
[39:36] And then, like Jacob, we also receive a new name. We are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. And we become Christians known and called by the name of Christ, not by our own name, no longer living for ourselves.

We're living in Christ and for Christ. Our allegiance is no longer to ourselves, to this world, or to our race, or to our ethnicity, or to our gender, or to our country, but to our God who is faithful to keep His promises.
And that's what it means to be a people of God. I pray all of you will come to know Him and have that relationship with Him. And if you're not yet a believer, not yet a Christian, then I urge you to consider entrusting your life to Him and getting baptized in His name.
We're planning on offering a baptism service sometime in the fall. I'll probably write in the next couple weeks a class as a primer for people who are interested in getting baptized.
If you're having a baptizer, if you want to know what the basics of Christianity is, what is Christianity all about, it would be a great opportunity to take advantage of that. I guess that's not the way I wanted to conclude that, but I think that's all I have to say.
[40:57] So let's pray. God, we are thankful, just overjoyed in Your presence, grateful that we can be here, that we can be sitting in Your presence and not be consumed by the just wrath of the Father, that we can be sitting in Your presence, the holy God, the perfect God, the eternal God as just fleeting human beings, sinful, selfish, prideful.

Yet because of Jesus, because of Your grace, because of the eternal love that You set on us from before the foundation of the world, we are here and we love You.
We are grateful for You. and Lord, we want to live in light of that truth. As people who are called, not by Your own name, but by Your name, we want to live with exclusive devotion and allegiance to You.
We want to worship only You, O God. Help us to do that through Jesus, by the power of Your Spirit. It's in Your Son's precious name we pray, Amen.
Amen. Thank you.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host - 2026-09-16 03:04:33