Chapter 34 recounts the rape of Dinah and the revenge of Simeon and Levi. After Shechem the Canaanite raped Dinah, Jacob’s daughter by Leah, Simeon and Levi plotted and took revenge by deceiving the Shechemites into getting circumcised as the condition for Dinah's marriage. Then, to get their full revenge, they murdered the incapacitated men of the city.

Once again, as in the birth of his sons (29:31–30:24), Jacob's household is dysfunctional because of his passivity. His sons are rash and unbridled, and he is passive. No one in this story escapes censure.

Contrast Jacob's great distress, upon hearing that Joseph had apparently been killed (37:34–35), with his lack of response upon hearing that Dinah had been raped. He favored Rachel's children terribly.

The story is a tangled skein of good and evil, as are all the patriarchal narratives.

Dinah must have been a teenager at this time. Keil and Delitzsch calculated from other references in Genesis that she was between 13 and 15 years of age, and John J. Davis wrote that she was 15 or 16 years of age. Her brothers, Simeon and Levi, were probably in their early twenties.
“Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. When Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he took her and lay with her by force. He was deeply attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her. So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, ‘Get me this young girl for a wife,’

Now Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter; but his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob kept silent until they came in. Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. Now the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it; and the men were grieved, and they were very angry because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob’s daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done. But Hamor spoke with them, saying, ‘The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter; please give her to him in marriage. Intermarry with us; give your daughters to us and take our daughters for yourselves. Thus you shall live with us, and the land shall be open before you; live and trade in it and acquire property in it.’ Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, ‘If I find favor in your sight, then I will give whatever you say to me. Ask me ever so much bridal payment and gift, and I will give according as you say to me; but give me the girl in marriage’” (Gen. 34:1–12).

34:1–12 Jacob had vowed to move on to Bethel (28:18–22; 31:13; cf. 35:1), yet he settled in the vicinity of Shechem (33:18). Dinah’s interest in the daughters of the land implies that she desired to mingle with the pagan Canaanites. This mingling with pagans led to defilement.

Here is another instance of a man seeing a woman and taking her for himself (cf. 6:2; 2 Sam. 11:2–4).

Moses used the name “Israel” here for the first time as a reference to God’s chosen people (v. 7). The family of Jacob had a special relationship to God by divine calling reflected in the name “Israel” (“Prince with God”). Therefore Shechem’s act was an especially “disgraceful thing,” having been committed against a member of the family with the unique vocation (cf. Deut. 22:21; Josh. 7:15; Judg. 20:10; 2 Sam. 13:12; et al.).

What had happened to Dinah was considered by Jacob’s family to be of the same nature as what later was known as “a disgraceful thing in Israel” (i.e., rape; v.7; cf. Josh. 7:15; 2 Sam. 13:12).
“13 But Jacob’s sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor with deceit, because he had defiled Dinah their sister. 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 consent to you: if you will become like us, in that every male of you be circumcised, 16 then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters for ourselves, and we will live with you and become one people. 17 But if you will not listen to us to be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and go’” (Gen. 34:13–17).

34:13–17 As was customary in their culture, Jacob’s sons took an active part in approving their sister’s marriage (v. 13; cf. 24:50). They were correct in opposing the end in view: the mixing of the chosen seed with the seed of the Canaanites. Yet they were wrong in adopting the means they selected to achieve their end. In their deception, they show themselves to be "chips off the old block," Jacob. The Hivites negotiated in good faith, but the Jacobites renegotiated treacherously (cf. Prov. 3:29; Amos 1:9).

Marriage was always preceded by betrothal, in which the bridegroom's family paid a mhd “marriage present” to the bride's family (1 Sam 18:25). In cases of premarital intercourse, this still had to be paid to legitimize the union, and the girl's father was allowed to fix the size of the marriage present (Exod. 22:16–17; limited by Deut. 22:29 to a maximum of fifty shekels). Here it seems likely that Shechem is offering both a “marriage present” (vv. 11, 12) to Jacob and “a gift” (v. 12) to Dinah.
Now their words seemed reasonable to Hamor and Shechem, Hamor's son. The young man did not delay to do the thing, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. Now he was more respected than all the household of his father. So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying, "These men are friendly with us; therefore let them live in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters in marriage, and give our daughters to them. Only on this condition will the men consent to us to live with us, to become one people: that every male among us be circumcised as they are circumcised. Will not their livestock and their property and all their animals be ours? Only let us consent to them, and they will live with us."

All who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and to his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city" (Gen. 34:18–24).

We can explain the agreement of the men of their city, including both Hamor (meaning "donkey," a valued and respected animal) and Shechem (v. 18), to undergo circumcision. Other nations besides Jacob's family practiced this rite, at this time in history, as an act of consecration. Jacob was not suggesting that these men convert from one religion to another. Normally circumcision was practiced on adults, rather than on infants, before God told Abraham to circumcise the infants born into his family (17:12–14).

Circumcision was sometimes an initiation into marriageable status.
Now it came about on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came upon the city unawares, and killed every male. They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went forth. Jacob's sons came upon the slain and looted the city, because they had defiled their sister. They took their flocks and their herds and their donkeys, and that which was in the city and that which was in the field; and they captured and looted all their wealth and all their little ones and their wives, even all that was in the houses" (Gen. 34:25–29).

34:25–29 Dinah, Simeon, and Levi were the children of Jacob and Leah, the "unloved wife" (v. 25). Simeon and Levi doubtless felt closer to Dinah, being blood-brothers, than some of her half-brothers did, for this reason. But Reuben, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun were also Leah's children, and thus Dinah's full brothers. The fact that only Simeon and Levi reacted as they did, against the men of Shechem, suggests that they responded with excessive recklessness. Perhaps Jacob's indifference to Dinah's plight, evidenced by his lack of action, encouraged the violent overreaction of her brothers. While Simeon and Levi took the lead in this atrocity, all of Jacob's sons evidently participated with them in the looting of the city (v. 27; cf. vv. 28–29). This was only the first of several notorious incidents that took place at Shechem (cf. Judg. 9:30–49; Jer. 41:4–8; Hos. 6:9).

The sons' instinct for justice was correct, but their methods were ruthless and excessive. Jacob and his sons, the appeaser and the avengers, swayed respectively by fear and fury, were perhaps equidistant from true justice.
Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, ‘You have brought trouble on me by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and my men being few in number, they will gather together against me and attack me and I will be destroyed, I and my household.’ But they said, ‘Should he treat our sister as a harlot?’” (Gen. 34:30–31)

Jacob's distress arose because of two facts: his sons had committed murder and robbery, and his family had now broken a covenant—a very serious act in their society. Jacob's censure is more a peevish complaint. It is ironic to hear Jacob venting his disgust over Simeon's and Levi's failure to honor their word, especially in terms of its potential consequence for Jacob, for he had done exactly that on more than one occasion. The crafty character of Jacob degenerated into malicious cunning in Simeon and Levi; and jealousy for the exalted vocation of their family, into actual sin. Deception proceeded to murder and pillage. As a result of this sin, Jacob later passed over Simeon and Levi when he gave his primary blessing (49:5–7). It went to Judah instead.

Of course, fear is natural in such a situation, but the reasons Jacob gives for damning his sons betray him. He does not condemn them for the massacre, for abusing the rite of circumcision, or even for breach of contract. Rather, he protests that the consequences of their action have made him unpopular. Nor does he seem worried by his daughter's rape or the prospect of intermarriage with the Canaanites. He is concerned only for his own skin.

It is interesting that Simeon and Levi referred to Dinah as "our sister" (v. 31), rather than as "Jacob's (your) daughter," which would have been the most appropriate in addressing Jacob. This implies that, since Jacob had not showed enough concern for Dinah, her "blood-brothers" felt compelled to act in her defense. This is an early indication that Jacob's family was already crumbling (becoming dysfunctional), which becomes obvious later when Joseph's brothers turn on him, sell him as a slave, and lie to their father (37:12–36).
The significance of chapter 34 is fourfold at least:

1. It explains why Jacob passed over Simeon and Levi for special blessing.

2. It shows the importance of keeping the chosen seed separate from the Canaanites.

   The law of Moses said that Israel was not to intermarry with the Canaanites or make treaties with them but was to destroy them because they posed such a threat. This passage provides part of the rationale for such laws, for it describes how immoral Canaanites defiled Israel by sexual contact and attempted to marry for the purpose of swallowing up Israel.

   Noah’s curse on Canaan and his seed had warned the rest of humanity that bad things would happen to people who mixed with the Canaanites (cf. 9:25–27).

   People who live on the borderland between church and world are like those who lived in the old days on the borders between England and Scotland—they are never safe.

3. It gives a reason for the sanctification of Jacob’s household that follows (35:2–4).

4. It demonstrates the sovereign control of God. While the story in this chapter operates at a level of family honor and the brothers’ concern for their ravaged sister, the story nevertheless also carries along the theme that runs so clearly through the Jacob narratives; namely, that God works through and often in spite of the limited self-serving plans of human beings. The writer's purpose is not to approve these human plans and schemes but to show how God, in his sovereign grace, could still achieve his purpose through them.
What message does such a sordid episode have in the Jacob-Joseph narratives? At this point forward, Genesis turns its attention to Jacob's sons, the progenitors of Israel's twelve tribes. After the tension of the Jacob-Esau struggle was alleviated in chapter 33's account of the twins' pacification, the author sets out to demonstrate the seedy character of Jacob's descendants, raising the specter that the promises are again in peril.

Abraham had dealt honorably with the Hittites (ch. 23), and Isaac had behaved peacefully with the Philistines (26:12–33). But now, Jacob's sons became the aggressors in a conflict with the Hivites. Simeon and Levi's unrepentant treachery stands in stark contrast to Esau and Jacob's recent moral transformations. In contrast to the Isaac incident in chapter 27, this chapter contains no prayer, no divine revelation, no promised blessing, and no explicit mention of God.

Younger zealots, such as Simeon and Levi, can sometimes bring reproach on God's covenant people through their misguided zeal. This can happen when spiritual leaders such as Jacob are indifferent to pagan defilement, and fail to act decisively against it.

This story shows Jacob's old nature reasserting itself, a man whose moral principles are weak, who is fearful of standing up for right when it may cost him dearly, who doubts God's power to protect, and who allows hatred to divide him from his children just as it had divided him from his brother.

Many believers bring the wrath of unbelievers on themselves and on other believers by their ungodly behavior, as Jacob, Simeon, and Levi did.
There are several life lessons (applications) that derive from a study of Genesis 34:

1. Mingling with pagans inevitably leads to defilement.
2. Sexual intimacy prior to marriage is immoral, especially when such intimacy is forced.
3. Defilement often excites drastic reactions by those who are zealous but immature—especially when leaders are indifferent.
4. Excessive acts of vengeance by believers profane the faith of God’s people.
5. When spiritual leaders are indifferent to, and fail to act decisively about pagan defilements, those who are immature may profane the faith by their misguided zeal.
6. By their ungodly behavior believers can bring the wrath of unbelievers on themselves and on other believers.
7. Attempting to destroy or punish evil through lawless or unrighteous acts should not be confused with righteous indignation. The righteous must seek justice and oppose evil in a manner that brings honor to God.