

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 10, Jacob and Joseph

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 10, Jacob and Joseph, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This is a transcript of a lecture on the book of Genesis, focusing on the concluding narratives of Jacob and Joseph. **Dr. Hildebrandt's lecture** covers Jacob's deception of his father Isaac and the ensuing consequences, Jacob's journey to Haran and his marriages, the wrestling match with God at Peniel, and Jacob's reconciliation with Esau. The lecture also **analyzes the Joseph narrative**, highlighting Joseph's wisdom, his trials, and his ultimate reconciliation with his brothers. **Key themes explored** include the consequences of deception, the nature of God's covenant, the complexities of family relationships, and the presence of both normative and non-normative elements within the biblical text. Finally, the lecture draws parallels between Joseph's story and wisdom literature.

2. 27 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 10 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Introduction → Old Testament Literature).



**Hildebrandt_OTLit_
Session10.mp3**

3. Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 10, Jacob and Joseph

Jacob and Joseph Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What does Jacob's name sound like in Hebrew, and what does it suggest about his character?
2. Describe the consequences of Jacob's deception of Isaac, both for Jacob and his family.
3. What is the significance of Bethel, and what does Jacob experience there?
4. How does the story of Jacob and his wives, Leah and Rachel, highlight the complexities of love and marriage?
5. Explain the difference between normative and non-normative interpretations of historical events in the Bible, using Jacob's actions as an example.
6. Describe how God intervenes in the rivalry between Leah and Rachel.
7. Why are the mandrake plants significant in the story of Jacob's wives?
8. What is the significance of the name "Israel" given to Jacob after his wrestling match at Peniel?
9. How does Jacob's encounter at Peniel change his life and his future interaction with his brother, Esau?
10. Describe the significance of the four tribes that the instructor identifies as most important: Levi, Judah, Joseph, and Benjamin.

Answer Key

1. Jacob's name sounds like "deceiver" or "heel grabber" in Hebrew, suggesting a character marked by trickery and deception. This is apparent in his actions from birth to adulthood.
2. Jacob's deception causes a rift in his family. Isaac realizes he can't trust anyone, Rebekah faces consequences of her favoritism, and Jacob has to flee for 20 years, breaking ties with his family.

3. Bethel is significant as the "house of God." Jacob experiences a vision of a stairway to heaven and renews the covenant with God, thus making the God of Abraham and Isaac also his God.
4. The story highlights a complicated interplay of love, lust, and societal norms. Jacob's love for Rachel leads to polygamy, but the unloved Leah receives God's blessing of children.
5. Normative interpretations are those that apply universally to all times. Non-normative interpretations are descriptive of historical events not intended to prescribe behavior, such as Jacob lying to his father or polygamy.
6. God intervenes by opening Leah's womb, while Rachel remains barren, showing divine favor towards the less-loved wife, thereby demonstrating God's support for the underdog.
7. The mandrakes are believed to be fertility plants, yet they do not lead to conception for Rachel. The text emphasizes that God, not the mandrakes, was responsible for Rachel's eventual pregnancy with Joseph.
8. The name "Israel" means "he who struggles with God," symbolizing Jacob's transformation through his encounter and struggle. It also reflects the ongoing dynamic between God and the Jewish people.
9. Jacob's encounter at Peniel leaves him with a physical disability (a limp), reminding him of God's power and his dependence on Him, compelling him to face Esau instead of fleeing.
10. Levi will provide priests; Judah will provide the kings; Joseph is the father of the tribes of the Northern Kingdom; and Benjamin was the tribe of the first king of Israel, Saul and also the apostle Paul.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Respond to each of the following prompts in essay format.

1. Analyze the character of Jacob throughout the lecture, discussing the complex interplay of deception, struggle, and divine blessing in his life.
2. Discuss the theological implications of the Jacob and Esau narrative, focusing on themes of sibling rivalry, deception, reconciliation, and the sovereignty of God.

3. Compare the ways that Jacob and Joseph navigate the challenges and setbacks in their lives, and describe the role that both familial relationships and divine guidance play in their character development.
4. Examine the recurring motifs of love, deception, and reconciliation in the Jacob narratives, and explore how these elements contribute to the themes of the broader story in Genesis.
5. Discuss the use of the terms theophany and Christophany, and the arguments for and against applying those labels to the story of Jacob at Peniel.

Glossary

Bethel: Meaning "house of God," a place where Jacob has a vision and renews the covenant with God. It later becomes a place of idolatry.

Christophany: An appearance of Christ before his incarnation, suggesting some believe Jacob's wrestling match was with Jesus.

Covenant: A sacred agreement or promise, specifically God's promise to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants and the promise of multiplying his seed and blessing to all nations.

Edomites: The descendants of Esau, traditionally enemies of the Israelites.

Haran: A city in Mesopotamia where Jacob flees to escape Esau and lives for 20 years.

Henotheism: The worship of one god while not denying the existence of other gods. The instructor uses this to describe Jacob who was adding the protection of pagan gods to his worship of Jehovah.

Israel: A name given to Jacob after he wrestles with God, meaning "he who struggles with God." This becomes the name of the nation of God's people.

Jacob: A patriarch of Israel whose name means "deceiver" or "heel-grabber" and whose life is characterized by trickery and transformation.

Joseph: Son of Rachel, a model of wisdom and integrity in the Bible, whose life parallels the "Cinderella story."

Levirate Marriage: The custom that required a man to marry his deceased brother's wife and have children in his brother's name.

Mandrake Plants: Plants believed to enhance fertility and sexual potency; they play a role in the rivalry between Leah and Rachel.

Non-Normative Interpretation: A way of reading Biblical historical narratives descriptively rather than prescriptively, understanding what happened without assuming that it is what should always happen.

Normative Interpretation: A way of reading Biblical narratives and history that assumes that what is described is what God wants us to do.

Peniel: The place where Jacob wrestles with God, a moment of spiritual transformation.

Polygamy: Having more than one wife, an issue in the life of Jacob; the lecture explores the ways polygamy is a difficult and not normative model for living.

Theophany: An appearance of God to humans, a term used to describe the encounter on Mount Sinai.

Ziggurat: A step pyramid, often found in ancient Mesopotamia, that is theorized to be a physical representation of Jacob's ladder.

4. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided lecture transcript on the end of Genesis, focusing on Jacob and Joseph:

Briefing Document: Genesis (Jacob and Joseph Narratives)

Overview: This lecture concludes the narrative of Jacob and introduces/concludes the Joseph story within the book of Genesis. Dr. Hildebrandt analyzes the characters' actions, motivations, and theological implications, highlighting the recurring themes of deception, consequences, divine sovereignty, and the nature of God's covenant.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. The Consequences of Deception (Jacob's Story):

- **Deception and Favoritism:** The lecture begins by reviewing Jacob's deception of his father Isaac to obtain the birthright. It emphasizes the role of parental favoritism (Isaac favored Esau, Rebekah favored Jacob) in driving the sibling rivalry and resulting in Jacob's deceit.
- *"So you have this deception of Isaac and this parental favoritism, the father favoring one and the mother the other, causing this sibling rivalry resulting in Jacob's lie, his deception."*
- **Consequences for All:** While Jacob "gets away with it," the lecturer stresses that his actions had consequences for everyone involved: Isaac's inability to trust his family, Rebekah's alienation from Esau's wives, and Jacob's forced 20-year exile.
- *"Now he realizes everyone that he should be able to trust he can't, even his own family! Can he trust his wife? His wife has betrayed him, his son has betrayed him..."*
- **Jacob's Name:** The lecture draws a connection between Jacob's name, which sounds like "deceiver" or "heel-grabber," and his deceptive character.
- *"Jacob's name sounds like 'deception,' or 'heel grabber.' Heel grabber on the way out of the womb but the Hebrew also sounds like 'deceiver.'"*

2. God's Covenant and Jacob's Transformation:

- **Bethel and the Renewal of the Covenant:** During his flight, Jacob encounters God at Bethel, which is presented as a significant turning point. God renews the covenant made with Abraham and Isaac, promising Jacob the land, numerous descendants, and blessing to all nations.
- *"As I was with Abraham and I gave Abraham the covenant that you would get this land, that your seed would multiply as the stars of heavens, and you would be a blessing to all nations. I gave the covenant to Abraham, I reiterated it to Isaac and now I'm giving it to you, Jacob."*
- **Personal Encounter with God:** Bethel is presented as a place where Jacob must make the covenant his own. The lecture highlights the difference between growing up in a religious family and personally experiencing God.
- *"God is the God of Abraham and Isaac but is God Jacob's God? So Jacob has to answer that question."*
- **Jacob's Vow at Bethel:** Jacob makes a conditional vow, promising God loyalty in exchange for safety and provision, which reveals that his relationship with God is still developing.
- *"Now Jacob made a vow, he said, 'if God will be with me and watch over me on this journey I am taking, and if he will give me food to eat and clothing to wear, so that I return in safety to my father's house, then the Lord will be my God.'"*
- **Play on Words with Bethel:** The lecturer points out the play on words where Jacob calls the stone "God's House," which echoes the meaning of Bethel. This implies Jacob is taking ownership of God's house.
- *"And this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house." Do you get the play on words here? God's house. What is that? Bethel means "God's house."*

3. Marriage and Deception in Haran:

- **Meeting Rachel at the Well:** Jacob meets Rachel at the well, mirroring the narrative of Isaac meeting Rebekah, which is a common trope in the ancient world.
- **Love, Lust, and Time:** The lecturer raises the question of distinguishing between love and lust, using his personal experience with his wife to illustrate the complexity of these feelings.

- **Laban's Deception:** Laban deceives Jacob by switching Leah for Rachel on the wedding night, highlighting the irony of Jacob, the deceiver, being deceived.
- *"Does the deceiver get deceived? And so all of Jacob's trickery, lying, and deceiving, all of a sudden, on his wedding night the deceiver gets deceived. It kind of suits him."*
- **Polygamy:** The lecture addresses the issue of Jacob's polygamous marriage, which leads to competition between his wives and numerous children. This introduces the idea of differentiating between *descriptive* and *prescriptive* actions within the Bible.
- *"Can you use that to say, 'Jacob was polygamous; therefore we should be polygamous?'" What I want to suggest to you is that when you're dealing with historical narratives you have to separate between that which is normative and that which is non-normative."*

4. Family Dynamics and Fertility:

- **Mandrake Plants:** Rachel's desire for children leads her to barter for mandrake plants, which were believed to enhance fertility. The lecture clarifies that it was God, not the mandrakes, who enabled her to conceive Joseph.
- *"Who is going to give Rachel her child? Is it going to be because she got the mandrakes? The text makes it clear that God opens her womb. "*
- **Rachel's Death:** Rachel's death while giving birth to Benjamin is highlighted, emphasizing the realities of childbirth in ancient times.
- **Stealing of Family Gods:** Rachel steals her father's family gods, possibly for inheritance purposes or, as an alternative suggestion, for fertility, further complicating family dynamics.
- *"Some people suggest that whoever had the family gods had the inheritance and so she could show up 20 years later and say, 'Dad, see I'm part of this family. Therefore I get part of the inheritance.'" So there were some possible inheritance rights involved."*

5. Jacob's Encounter at Peniel and Reconciliation with Esau:

- **Wrestling at Jabbok:** Jacob's wrestling match with a divine being at Peniel is interpreted as a "theophany" or "Christophany" – an appearance of God or Christ.

- **Name Change to Israel:** Jacob's name is changed to "Israel," meaning "he who struggles with God," reflecting his lifelong relationship with the divine. This name signifies not only a personal transformation, but also the genesis of the national identity of Israel.
- *"'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' The man asked him, 'what is your name?' 'Jacob' he answered and the man said, 'your name is no longer Jacob but Israel.'"*
- **Limping and Vulnerability:** The injury to Jacob's hip is interpreted as a divine act rendering him vulnerable, forcing him to face his brother Esau rather than run away.
- *"Now what does God do with Jacob, Jacob's hip is gone. Can Jacob run away from Esau? No. He can't run now, he's got to face Esau."*
- **Jacob Deceives Esau Again:** Despite his encounter at Peniel, Jacob still lies to Esau by saying he will meet him but going in the opposite direction.
- *"Jacob says, 'Oh, yes, I'll come down and see you.'" So Esau says, "Well, my guys will protect your sheep and goats for you and we'll go down together." But Jacob says, "No, no, my sheep and goats they've got to go slow. So Esau you just go back home and I'll come down and visit you." ...Did Jacob lie to Esau, telling him that he's going to meet him down here, and then he goes in the opposite direction."*
- **Edom and the Edomites:** Esau's descendants become the Edomites, who are repeatedly depicted as enemies of the Israelites throughout scripture.
- *"whenever you see Edom, or Edomites in Scripture, those are Esau's descendants. By the way, I should say whenever you see Edomites in Scripture the Edomites will always do pretty much do the same thing. What do the Edomites do? They kill Jews."*

6. The "Uncomfortable" Chapters and the Purpose of Narrative

- **Rape of Dinah and Shechem:** The lecture addresses the violent story of Dinah's rape, highlighting the flawed responses of Jacob and his sons, emphasizing the need to see the Bible as it is.
- *"Chapter 34, first of all, is the raping of Dinah...So Dinah gets raped, now why is this guy Shechem really really stupid? Do you mess with a girl who's got 12 brothers? No."*

- **Judah and Tamar:** The problematic story of Judah and Tamar, involving incest and deception is discussed, noting that the Bible presents these stories descriptively rather than prescriptively. It notes that Tamar ends up in the lineage of Jesus in the New Testament.
- *"By the way is Judah a big tribe of Israel? Judah is David. As a matter of fact Tamar, is in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. In Matthew chapter 1, guess who shows up? Tamar."*
- **Literary Purpose:** The lecturer suggests these narratives eliminate older brothers (Simeon, Levi, the sons of Judah) to focus on the importance of Joseph's role later in Genesis.
- *"what I'm going to suggest to you is that what you have here is the elimination of the older brothers...as a literary technique to move you away from the older brothers to focus on Joseph and I think that's what's going on here."*

7. The Joseph Narrative:

- **Comparison of Jacob and Joseph:** The lecture highlights similarities and differences between Jacob and Joseph's stories, noting the recurring themes of the supremacy of the younger brother and family strife.
- *"For example, in both the Jacob story and the Joseph story you have the supremacy of the younger brother. Jacob is the younger brother, Esau is the older brother. Jacob is supreme. Joseph is the younger brother, the older brothers are all corrupt, Joseph is the winner."*
- **Joseph and Wisdom Literature:** The lecture draws comparisons between the Joseph narrative and ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. Joseph is presented as a wise figure who is lifted up from low status, akin to the "Cinderella" story.
- *"'Once upon a time, there was a person of very high status who had a problem and he went all through his kingdom searching through this kingdom...The person of low status, solves the king's problem and she is put over the whole kingdom and they all live happily ever after.' ...Now is that what you have with the Joseph story too?"*
- **Joseph's Wise Traits:** The lecture connects Joseph to wisdom themes by comparing him to a wise man: he interprets dreams; he avoids sexual temptation; he models silence, and ultimately acknowledges God's hand in his life.

- *"'You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.' This is a reversal! Does God do the reversals? He takes what's evil and turns it into good?"*

8. Key Figures and their Significance

- **The 12 Tribes of Israel:** The lecture emphasizes the importance of 4 of the 12 tribes of Israel: Levi (priestly tribe), Judah (royal tribe), Joseph (northern tribes), and Benjamin (tribe of the first king, Saul/Paul).

Conclusion:

This lecture provides a rich and detailed analysis of the Jacob and Joseph narratives, emphasizing not only the complexities of human relationships, but also the sovereignty and redemptive power of God. The lecture highlights the way in which the Bible presents the flaws and failings of even its most prominent figures, while demonstrating how God works through imperfect people. It also draws connections between biblical stories and other types of ancient literature, helping listeners to see the text from new perspectives.

5. FAQs on Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 10, Jacob and Joseph, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Jacob and Joseph in Genesis

1. **What are the consequences of Jacob's deception of Isaac?** Jacob's deception, orchestrated with his mother Rebekah, had far-reaching consequences for everyone involved. Isaac, now an old blind man, realized he couldn't trust his own family. Jacob, to avoid his brother Esau's wrath, was forced to flee for 20 years, severing his ties with his family and his home. The deceit caused a major rift in the family, highlighting the serious repercussions of breaking trust and seeking power through lies.
2. **What is the significance of Jacob's dream at Bethel?** At Bethel, Jacob had a profound dream of a stairway (or ziggurat) connecting heaven and earth, with angels ascending and descending. This was a pivotal moment where God reaffirmed the covenant previously given to Abraham and Isaac, promising Jacob land, descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth, and a blessing that would extend to all nations. It also marked a moment of personal encounter where God became Jacob's God, not just the God of his ancestors, initiating Jacob's own faith journey. This contrasts with merely inheriting faith, as many do from family.
3. **What does Jacob's vow at Bethel reveal about his relationship with God?** Jacob's vow at Bethel reveals a transactional approach to faith initially. He declares that *if* God protects him on his journey, provides food and clothing, and brings him safely back to his father's house, *then* the Lord will be his God. This shows an initial conditional relationship with God, which contrasts with more mature faith based on trust. However, his vow also introduces the idea of tithing and memorial stones, indicating a growing awareness of religious practice. He also plays on the meaning of "Bethel," the "house of God", further highlighting his growing awareness of God.

4. **Why does Jacob meet women at the well?** The well was a common gathering place for women in the ancient world, often due to the necessity of collecting water for their families and flocks. Because of this, it became a common location for romantic encounters. Jacob meeting Rachel at a well is part of a literary pattern which can be seen with Isaac and Rebekah, and Moses and Zipporah. Meeting at a well is not only a means of romantic introduction, but also shows that the woman is hard-working.
5. **How does Jacob's marriage to both Leah and Rachel affect him?** Jacob's marriage to both Leah and Rachel resulted from deception by Laban, who switched the brides on Jacob's wedding night. This led to a complex and competitive polygamous relationship. The wives compete to bear him children, highlighting the strife and tension created by the arrangement. It becomes a major theme showing that polygamy, while recorded in scripture, is not a "normative" example.
6. **What is the significance of the story of Jacob wrestling with God?** Jacob's wrestling match with a divine being at Peniel is transformative. This represents a personal struggle with God that results in Jacob's name being changed to "Israel," meaning "he who struggles with God." This name change signifies a shift in his identity and character, from "deceiver" to one who wrestles with God. This wrestling can also be seen as a *theophany* or a *Christophany*, where the individual encounters the divine, which may be pre-incarnate Jesus. The encounter also leaves Jacob with a limp, highlighting that he now must rely on God rather than on his own strength or cunning.
7. **Why are the stories of the rape of Dinah and Judah and Tamar included in Genesis?** The narratives of the rape of Dinah and Judah and Tamar both portray immoral actions and are frequently skipped over by Christians. They are not examples of actions to be replicated, but are descriptions of what actually happened, not necessarily endorsements of the behaviors. They also act as a literary device to refocus the narrative away from the older brothers in favor of Joseph and his lineage.

8. How does the story of Joseph demonstrate the themes of wisdom literature?

The narrative of Joseph shares themes with wisdom literature, as well as the Cinderella archetype. Joseph rises from low status (a prisoner) to high status (a ruler). He interprets dreams like a wise man (e.g., Daniel) and displays wisdom in managing the resources of Egypt during the famine. He exhibits the wisdom trait of the "silent man," hiding his emotions from his brothers. Most importantly, he embodies the concept that God can take what was intended for evil and transform it for good, which is the theme when he tells his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good."