

Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Session 20, Jacob's Daughter and Return to Bethel (Gen 34:1-37:1) Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathews, Genesis, Session 20, Jacob's Daughter and Return to Bethel (Gen. 34:1-37:1), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Kenneth Mathews' Genesis session 20 examines the concluding chapters of Jacob's story, specifically Genesis 34:1-37:1. **The lecture traces a transition** from Jacob's past to the future of his lineage, highlighting **the moral decline of his sons** as a central theme. **This decline is contrasted with God's unwavering promises**, foreshadowing the Joseph narrative and the eventual repentance of Jacob's sons. **The session also details key events**, such as Jacob's return to Bethel and the tragic consequences of his sons' actions in Shechem, ultimately emphasizing God's faithfulness despite human failings.

2. 19 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathews, Genesis, Session 20 – 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 → Pentateuch → Genesis).



**Mathews_Genesis_
Session20.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathews, Genesis, Session 20, Jacob's Daughter and Return to Bethel (Gen 34:1-37:1)

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. Kenneth Mathews' lecture on Genesis chapters 34-37:1:

Briefing Document: Genesis 34-37:1 - Jacob's Daughter and Return to Bethel

Introduction

This briefing summarizes Dr. Kenneth Mathews' lecture (Session 20) on Genesis 34-37:1, focusing on Jacob and his sons, highlighting the moral decline of the sons, the fulfillment of God's promise at Bethel, and the movement of Jacob's family toward Hebron. The lecture emphasizes the transition from the past to the future of Jacob's lineage, and how the events within this section help to contextualize the Joseph narrative.

Key Themes

- **Moral Decline of Jacob's Sons:** Chapter 34 dramatically exposes the moral decay of Jacob's sons through the Dinah incident. Their actions are marked by deceit and violence.
- **Quote:** *"Chapter 34 is beginning to expose very dramatically the moral decline on the part of Jacob's sons."*
- **Deception as a Recurring Motif:** The theme of deception, prominent in earlier narratives (Abraham's wife-sister deceit and Jacob's own history), reaches a "high point" with Jacob's sons' deceitful revenge against the Shechemites. This sets the stage for further deceit in the Joseph story.
- **Quote:** *"Throughout the remaining stories, we will see time and again how deceit functions in the story as an important ongoing motif..."*
- **Fulfillment of the Bethel Promise:** Chapter 35 marks the fulfillment of God's promise to Jacob in chapter 28 that he would return to Bethel and worship the Lord. This return is a significant spiritual turning point.
- **Geographical and Spiritual Movement:** The narrative traces Jacob's physical movement southward, from Shechem to Bethel, and then towards Hebron. This geographical movement is mirrored by Jacob's spiritual journey.
- **God's Faithfulness Amidst Human Failure:** Despite the wretched behavior of Jacob's sons, God's promises endure. God works within the flawed characters and

their circumstances to bring about His purposes, which ultimately lead to repentance.

- **Quote:** *"God works with these people, not because of their merit, not because of their high standards of righteousness, but rather God works with these people...out of his love for the fathers."*
- **Transition from Past to Future:** The narrative uses four burials as markers to close the past era: the burial of household gods, the burial of Deborah, the burial of Rachel and finally the burial of Isaac. These signal a move away from the past and toward the future of Jacob's lineage.
- **The Significance of Names:** The naming of Jacob as Israel and its repetition is a reminder of his struggle with God and its lasting spiritual significance for the people of Israel.

Key Ideas and Facts

- **The Shechem Incident:** Dinah, Jacob's daughter, is violated by Shechem, the son of Hamor (a Hivite ruler). The term used for the violation may not mean rape per se, but rather a humiliation, likely a premarital sexual assault. This act of violence against Dinah serves as the catalyst for the deceit and violence that follows.
- **Quote:** *"Traditionally, that has been translated rape, and there's been some debate about the meaning of this Hebrew word, which can mean, and is broadly means, humiliation."*
- **Jacob's Inaction:** Jacob's response to his sons' actions is primarily self-centered. He is more concerned about potential retaliation from neighbors than addressing the moral wrong done.
- **Quote:** *"He scolds them because they're not doing the right thing. He says I will become odorous in the view of the local neighbors...he doesn't address the immorality of his sons, only the consequences."*
- **Simeon and Levi's Deceit:** Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, deceive the Shechemites into getting circumcised by framing this ritual as a requirement for intermarriage. Their deceitfulness is then used to exploit the Shechemite's weakened state, leading to the slaughter of every male.
- **Quote:** *"Jacob's sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father...This would have been a significant change in the minds of the Shechemites, which they chose to do. "*

- **Circumcision:** This ritual is a covenant sign for the Abrahamic covenant and is exploited by the sons of Jacob as a way to deceive the Shechemites. This act is considered a desecration of something sacred.
- **Quote:** *"Here, the parade signal, the sign passed down from generation to generation of God's love for the patriarchs and in turn, the people of God in their love of God. And this is used for the worst of purposes."*
- **Jacob's Return to Bethel:** This return fulfills the promise made to Jacob at Bethel (Gen 28). Jacob purges the household of idols and is reaffirmed of his name Israel. God's presence, and blessing are significant elements of the Bethel episode.
- **Quote:** *"After Jacob returned for Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again... and blessed him."*
- **Deaths of Deborah and Rachel:** These deaths are mentioned, including Rachel's death in childbirth with Benjamin, emphasizing that Joseph and Benjamin are sons of Jacob's favored wife. The story of Rachel's difficult birth is seen as a kind of echo of Jacob and Esau's struggle in the womb.
- **Reuben's Incest:** Reuben's incestuous act with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine, further highlights the moral decline within Jacob's family. This disqualifies Reuben as the recipient of the firstborn blessing.
- **Quote:** *"Who would have possibly thought that the firstborn of the twelve, Reuben, would have committed incest by having a sexual union with Bilhah?"*
- **Genealogies of Esau:** The listing of Esau's descendants and Edomite kings in chapter 36 contrasts with the story of Jacob's lineage and how it will lead to the messianic line from Judah.
- **Edomite Kings and Future Kings of Israel:** The passage notes that "these were the kings who reigned in Edom before any Israelite king reigned" (Gen 36:31), an observation likely made after the establishment of the Israelite monarchy. This sets up a contrast with the future kings of Israel, who will come from the line of Judah, including David and ultimately, Jesus.

Implications and Connections

- **Preparation for the Joseph Narrative:** The moral failures and deceit in these chapters serve as a crucial backdrop for the Joseph narrative and the struggles of Jacob's sons. These chapters provide a framework for understanding the motivation behind the sons' actions against Joseph.

- **God's Covenant and Grace:** Despite the deep-seated flaws of Jacob and his sons, God continues to fulfill His covenant promises. This illustrates God's grace and faithfulness working within and through flawed individuals and that God works with people "where they are."
- **Importance of Repentance:** The lecture emphasizes the importance of repentance and that God is inclined to forgive and restore those who turn back to Him. This is exemplified through Psalm 130. The lecture notes that although these men behave badly, future chapters will reveal that these men did eventually turn towards God.
- **God's Personal and Active Involvement:** Dr. Mathews underscores the personal and active involvement of God in the lives of the patriarchs and their descendants. God is not distant or impersonal but engages with humanity through various means. This is highlighted by the return to Bethel, the personal engagement of God with Jacob and the naming of Jacob/Israel.

Conclusion

Genesis 34-37:1 presents a period of significant transition in the Jacob narrative. The moral failures of Jacob's sons are contrasted with God's unwavering faithfulness and his plan for the future. This section sets the stage for the Joseph narrative and the broader unfolding of God's covenant with Israel. This passage is not just a record of past events, but also a teaching on God's work and promises and what it means for both ancient and contemporary believers.

4. Study Guide: Mathews, Genesis, Session 20, Jacob's Daughters and Return to Bethel (Gen. 34:1-37:1)

Genesis Chapters 34-37: A Study Guide

Quiz

1. What does the purchase of land in Shechem by Jacob signify beyond just acquiring territory?
2. Describe the significance of the names "Israel" and "El Elohei" in the context of Jacob's story.
3. How do Simeon and Levi respond to the violation of their sister Dinah, and what does this reveal about their character?
4. Why is the act of the Jacob's sons' deception and violence against the Shechemites considered so egregious?
5. What is Jacob's primary concern when he hears of his sons' actions against the Shechemites?
6. What actions are taken before the move to Bethel, and what is their symbolic meaning?
7. How does the account of God's appearance to Jacob at Bethel tie back to earlier events in his life?
8. What significant events happen surrounding the deaths of Deborah and Rachel?
9. Describe Reuben's act of incest and its consequence, and why it is included in the narrative at this point.
10. How does chapter 36, which details the descendants of Esau, serve as a contrast or parallel to the narrative about Jacob and his sons?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The purchase of land in Shechem signifies Jacob's intent to establish a permanent community, not just a temporary sojourn, and to build positive relationships with the local people; it also parallels Abraham's previous worship in the same location.

2. "Israel" signifies Jacob's transformed identity after his struggle with God, emphasizing his dependence on God, while "El Elohei" acknowledges God's unique place in their family and is a link to the traditions of Abraham and Isaac.
3. Simeon and Levi respond with anger and deceit, ultimately committing murder and robbery to avenge Dinah's violation, demonstrating a moral decline and a tendency towards violence and self-interest.
4. The sons' deception is particularly egregious because they used a sacred sign of their covenant relationship with God (circumcision) as a tool for a violent and self-serving act of vengeance and murder.
5. Jacob's primary concern is for his own safety and the security of his household, fearing retaliation from surrounding tribes due to his sons' violent actions, revealing his self-interest over moral concerns.
6. Before leaving for Bethel, the family discards and buries foreign gods, engages in cleansing rituals and changes their clothes, which are all symbolic of leaving behind idolatry and sin and embracing a renewed relationship with God.
7. God's appearance at Bethel is a reiteration of the promise given to Jacob when he initially fled Esau, and it confirms the importance of returning to worship the Lord and symbolizes the beginning of Jacob's return journey after his time away.
8. Deborah, Rachel's maidservant, dies and is buried. During childbirth Rachel dies, giving birth to Benjamin, and is buried near Bethlehem; her death further emphasizes the theme of struggle and loss.
9. Reuben's incest with Bilhah, his father's concubine, is a gross abuse of power and privilege, illustrating the further moral depravity of Jacob's sons, and is presented as the reason Reuben will lose his privileged status as firstborn.
10. Chapter 36, detailing Esau's descendants, parallels Jacob's narrative with its focus on tribal origins, but contrasts with it by pointing out that even while Esau's line leads to kings, Israel's line holds a promise of a coming king, emphasizing God's plan for Jacob's descendants.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the role of deceit in Genesis chapters 34-37, exploring its manifestation in the characters of Jacob, his sons, and the broader narrative, and discuss its consequences on their relationships and spiritual journey.
2. Compare and contrast the characters of Jacob and his sons, focusing on their respective responses to the events in Shechem and Bethel, and how their actions and attitudes contribute to the overarching themes of the narrative.
3. Discuss the theme of God's faithfulness in the face of human failure as depicted in these chapters, providing specific examples of how God's promises and actions impact the lives of the patriarchs and their descendants despite their moral shortcomings.
4. Examine the significance of Jacob's return to Bethel, including the events that precede and follow it, and discuss how it serves as a turning point in Jacob's spiritual development and the narrative's progression.
5. Explore the cultural context of the events in Genesis chapters 34-37, considering the practices of circumcision, intermarriage, and other customs, and analyze how these cultural norms shape the conflicts and relationships within the narrative.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Bethel:** A significant location where Jacob had a dream of a ladder to heaven and where God renewed his promises; Jacob is commanded to return and worship there in chapter 35.
- **Circumcision:** A ritual removal of the foreskin, a covenant sign between God and Abraham, adopted as a distinguishing practice of the Israelites; deceitfully used by Jacob's sons.
- **El Elohei:** A title meaning "God, the God of Israel;" it signifies the continuation of the covenantal relationship between the patriarchs and God, who set up altars for worship.
- **Edomites:** Descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother, who form their own nation as detailed in chapter 36; their history serves as a contrast to Israel.
- **Hivites:** One of the Canaanite people groups inhabiting the land of Canaan, and are described as enemies of Israel.
- **Israel:** The new name given to Jacob after wrestling with God, representing his transformed character and a nation that bears his name; symbolizes a struggle with God.
- **Shechem:** A city in Canaan where Jacob settled and purchased land, it also refers to the person of a Hivite prince who violated Dinah, causing conflict.
- **Shechemites:** The inhabitants of Shechem, who are tricked and murdered by Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, due to the rape of Dinah.
- **Paddan Aram:** The region from which Jacob originally came, from the household of his uncle, Laban.
- **Reconciliation:** The restoration of friendly relations between parties in conflict, seen with Jacob's reconciliation with Esau and the hope for future reconciliation between peoples.

5. FAQs on Mathews, Genesis, Session 20, Jacob's Daughters and Return to Bethel (Gen. 34:1-37:1), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Genesis 34-37: Jacob's Family, Moral Decline, and God's Faithfulness

1. **What is the main focus of Genesis chapters 34-36, and what major transitions are evident in these chapters?** These chapters primarily focus on Jacob and his 12 sons, marking a transition from the past to the future of Jacob's lineage. The chapters highlight the moral decline of Jacob's sons, particularly in chapter 34, while also showing God's continued faithfulness in fulfilling his promises. This transition includes geographical movement (from Shechem to Bethel and Hebron) and a shift in focus towards Jacob's sons and the future of his descendants, along with a move away from the prior generation of Isaac and Esau.
2. **What is the significance of the incident involving Dinah in Genesis 34?** The incident with Dinah, Jacob's daughter, where she is violated by Shechem, exposes the moral decline of Jacob's sons. Simeon and Levi, her full brothers, respond to this with deceit and violence by plotting to murder the Shechemites. Jacob, however, is primarily concerned with his own safety rather than the immorality of his sons' actions, highlighting a setback in his spiritual development. This shows how deceit, a motif throughout Genesis, continues within Jacob's family and is a preparation for future acts of deceit that will occur in the Joseph narrative.
3. **How does Jacob's reaction to his sons' actions in Shechem reveal his character at this point in the narrative?** Jacob's reaction is primarily self-interested, showing a concern for his own safety and the potential repercussions from neighboring groups rather than expressing moral outrage at his sons' horrific actions or seeking to correct them. He is more worried about how the slaughter will affect his standing with other nations than the actions themselves. This reveals a lapse in Jacob's spiritual development at this time.

4. **What is the significance of the Shechemites agreeing to be circumcised, and what does it reveal about Jacob's sons?** The Shechemites' agreement to be circumcised is deceitfully obtained by Jacob's sons who falsely claim they require it to intermarry and form a treaty, which would benefit both families. However, the use of the sacred covenant sign of circumcision to deceive and murder the Shechemites reveals a deep moral corruption within Jacob's sons, indicating how low they had sunk morally and how they misused a sacred rite for personal gain.
5. **What does Jacob's return to Bethel in Genesis 35 signify?** Jacob's return to Bethel is a fulfillment of God's promise in chapter 28, marking a renewed commitment to God's calling in his life. It also represents a purification and cleansing from idolatry, symbolized by the burial of foreign gods and a change of clothing. God also appears to Jacob again, reiterating the promise of a great nation and renaming him Israel, emphasizing his spiritual journey. This journey is not without tragedy though as the deaths of Rachel and Deborah occur shortly after.
6. **How does the story in Genesis 34-35 show the tension between human sinfulness and God's faithfulness?** Throughout the narrative, the moral failures of Jacob and his sons are evident in their deceit and violence. This stands in stark contrast to God's persistent faithfulness in fulfilling the covenant promises to Jacob, including reaffirming his name as Israel and promising him descendants and land. Even though his people are flawed, God remains committed to drawing them to repentance and redeeming them, demonstrating that God's plan continues to unfold despite human sin.
7. **What is the significance of the burials mentioned in this section (Genesis 34-36), and what do they symbolize?** There are four burials mentioned. The first, the burial of the household gods, represents a symbolic break from idolatry and a purification before returning to Bethel. The burial of Deborah, Rachel and then Isaac, Jacob's father, symbolizes the transition from the past generation to a new focus on Jacob's sons and the future generations. The death of Rachel in childbirth, specifically the birth of Benjamin, also symbolizes the beginning of favoritism shown by Jacob to Rachel's sons. The burials, in a broad sense, serve as markers of significant events in the lives of Jacob and his family.

8. **How do these chapters prepare the reader for the Joseph narrative that begins in Chapter 37, and what themes are introduced?** These chapters set the stage for the Joseph narrative by introducing key themes such as deceit, family conflict, and the consequences of moral compromise. The moral decline of Jacob's sons, the favoritism toward Joseph and Benjamin, and the continuing motif of deceit (seen in how Jacob's sons handle the Dinah incident) all contribute to the circumstances that lead to Joseph's betrayal and enslavement. The underlying theme of God's sovereignty and his ability to work through the actions of both good and evil individuals also sets the stage for Joseph's later recognition that God used his brothers' betrayal for a greater good.