

Genesis: Isaac/Rebekah and the Early Life of Jacob

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Abstract

This lecture covers the biblical narratives of Isaac, Rebekah, and the early life of Jacob, focusing on the preservation of the covenant promise across three generations. It details the births, marriages, and conflicts of the patriarchs, particularly emphasizing the divine intervention in Rebekah's pregnancy and the deception surrounding Jacob's blessing. Despite human schemes, favoritism, and failures of faith, God overrules sinful actions to accomplish His sovereign purposes. The lecture concludes with Jacob's flight to Haran, his vision of the ladder at Bethel, and his marriages to Leah and Rachel under the manipulation of Laban.

Outline

I. Isaac

A. His Birth (Genesis 17, 18, and 21)

1. Promise of birth in Genesis 17:19 to Sarah
2. Repetition of promise in Genesis 18 and Sarah's laughter
3. Birth of Isaac in Genesis 21 when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 years old

B. Isaac Being Offered (Genesis 22)

1. High point of Abraham's faith

C. His Marriage (Genesis 24)

1. Isaac's passivity in the arrangement of his marriage by his father through his servant
2. God designates Rebekah (daughter of Bethuel, Abraham's nephew) as his wife through a sign
3. Marriage is key for continuing the covenant line of promise

D. His Sons (Genesis 25:19ff.)

1. Structural division in Genesis: "These are the generations of Isaac"
2. Rebekah's 20-year barrenness (Isaac married at 40, sons born when he was 60)
3. Covenant seed comes by God's special intervention in response to Isaac's prayer

4. Prophetic revelation: Two nations in the womb, the elder shall serve the younger
5. Birth of twins: Esau (red and hairy) and Jacob (holding Esau's heel)

E. The Covenant is Reaffirmed to Isaac (Genesis 26:1-5)

1. Famine in the land prompts Isaac to go to Gerar (Abimelech, king of Philistines)
2. God commands Isaac not to go to Egypt and promises to bless him and give land to his descendants
3. Repetition of the Abrahamic promises: numerous descendants and blessing to all nations
4. Reaffirmation of covenant promises again in Genesis 26:24

F. Isaac Deceived by His Wife and His Son (Genesis 27)

1. Isaac's attempt to bless Esau in contradiction to God's previously revealed will
2. Rebekah overhears and instigates the deception plan
3. Jacob's hesitation due to fear of a curse (hairy brother vs. smooth skin)
4. Deception using goat skins on Jacob's hands and neck and preparation of savory food
5. Blessing of prosperity, lordship over brethren, and Abrahamic blessings bestowed on Jacob
6. Isaac's violent trembling upon Esau's return and discovery of the deception

7. God Accomplishing His Will In Spite of Isaac's Failure of Faith

- a. Inadequacy of faith that relies on human ingenuity (Rebekah and Jacob's deception)
- b. Faults on both sides: Isaac attempting to thwart divine will, Rebekah/Jacob deceiving
- c. Role of favoritism (Isaac loved Esau for his venison; Rebekah loved Jacob)
- d. Sovereign overruling: God accomplishes His purposes through sinful human actions

8. Esau's Response and "Blessing"

- a. Isaac as a hero of faith: bows to God's will, accepts that Jacob is blessed
- b. Esau's bitter cry and request for a blessing
- c. Translation issue of the Hebrew preposition 'min' in Genesis 27:39
 - i. 'Min' of source (KJV): dwelling in the fatness of earth (identical blessing)
 - ii. 'Min' of separation (NIV): dwelling away from earth's richness (a curse)
 - iii. Edom's barren wilderness environment south of the Dead Sea supports separation
- d. Subsequent historical relationship between Israel (Jacob) and Edom (Esau)
 - i. David subjects Edomites initially and establishes fortresses
 - ii. Edomites push into southern Judah in the intertestamental period
 - iii. Forced Judaization by the Maccabees makes them Idumeans
 - iv. Herod the Great, an Idumean, comes on the scene as King of the Jews

G. Isaac's Last Days (Genesis 35:27-29)

1. Jacob returns to his father Isaac in Mamre (Hebron)
2. Isaac dies at 180 years old and is buried by Esau and Jacob

II. Jacob

A. Jacob at Bethel (Jacob's Ladder)

1. Jacob flees home after Esau purposes to kill him
2. Rebekah's dual motive: protection of Jacob and avoiding Canaanite wives (daughters of Heth)
3. Isaac commands Jacob to marry from the household of Laban in Padan-aram
4. Isaac repeats and extends the blessing of Abraham to Jacob
5. Jacob's dream at Bethel: stairway/ladder reaching to heaven with ascending/descending angels
6. God takes the initiative to reaffirm the covenant promise directly to Jacob
7. Symbolic meaning of the ladder: communion between God and Jacob (needs carried up, grace sent down)

8. Jacob's Vow (Genesis 28:16-22)

- a. Anointing of the stone pillar and naming the place Bethel ("house of God")
- b. Grammatical/Translation issue regarding the placement of the apodosis (main clause)
 - i. Standard translation (KJV/NIV): "then shall the Lord be my God..." (criticized as bargaining)
 - ii. Alternate translation (Leupold): "and the Lord is my God, THEN this stone shall be God's house"
 - iii. Aalders' view: Jacob still shows a selfish bargaining spirit, true surrender comes later (Gen. 32)

B. The Years at Haran (Genesis 29-31)

1. Incipient fulfillment of seed multiplication through the birth of eleven sons
2. Eleven sons from two wives and two concubines become heads of the tribes of Israel

3. Jacob, Rachel, and Leah

- a. Jacob meets cousin Rachel and agrees to work seven years for Laban to marry her
- b. Laban deceives Jacob on the wedding night, substituting the elder sister Leah (who was veiled and willing)
- c. The irony of the deceiver (Jacob) himself being deceived by Laban
- d. Laban demands an additional seven years of labor for Rachel
- e. A humorous limerick from the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society summarizing the event