

Old Testament Literature

Genesis: Jacob and Joseph

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Session 10

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Abstract

This lecture provides a comprehensive analysis of the closing patriarchal narratives in Genesis, focusing on the lives and theological significance of Jacob and Joseph. Dr. Ted Hildebrandt explores the moral complexities, parental favoritism, and divine consequences surrounding Jacob's deception, his transformative encounter with God at Bethel and Peniel, and the formation of the twelve tribes of Israel. The narrative then shifts to Joseph, contrasting his character as a model of wisdom, integrity, and divine providence against the moral decay of his older brothers. Ultimately, the source highlights how God sovereignly overrules human betrayal, sin, and flaw to accomplish His redemptive covenant promises.

Outline

I. Introduction and Class Logistics

A. Overview of finishing Genesis material

1. Coverage of Jacob stories and Joseph narrative
2. Upcoming readings in Numbers and exam study guides

B. Opening Prayer and Theological Theme

1. Thanksgiving for the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob)
2. Focus on God's persistent care despite human moral flaws

II. Jacob Gets the Birthright and Consequences of Deception

A. Deception of Isaac and Parental Favoritism

1. Isaac favors Esau; Rebekah favors Jacob
2. Rebekah plots deception of the blind Isaac using goat hair
3. Jacob's name association: 'heel-grabber' and 'deceiver'

B. Ripple Consequences for All Parties Involved

1. Isaac's trembling: sudden realization of total betrayal by family
2. Esau's murderous plot: harboring death threats until Isaac passes
3. Rebekah's loss: 20-year separation from Jacob and tension with Hittite daughters-in-law

4. Jacob's forced flight: 20-year exile to Haran cut off from home

C. Geographic Context: The Dead Sea (Salt Sea)

1. Geography of Jordan Valley, elevation (1,270 ft below sea level), and high salinity (33%)
2. Mineral qualities (Ahava creams) and physical buoyancy

III. Jacob's Ladder and Divine Encounter at Bethel

A. Journey to Bethel ('House of God')

1. Jacob stops at Bethel with a stone pillow
2. Dream of stairway/ladder reaching to heaven with ascending/descending angels
3. Ziggurat imagery: Mesopotamian step pyramid structure adapted by God

B. Renewal of the Abrahamic Covenant

1. Reiteration of three core promises: Land, Seed, and Universal Blessing
2. Personal faith transition: Abraham and Isaac's God becomes Jacob's God
3. 'College years' analogy: differentiation and making faith personal

C. Memorial Pillar and Conditional Vow

1. Setting up memorial stone (historical context of DC monuments)
2. Jacob's vow for safety, food, clothing, and returning in peace
3. Wordplay on Bethel ('God's house') and origin of the tenth/tithe

IV. Jacob at Haran: Rachel, Leah, and Laban

A. Meeting at the Well

1. Cultural context: wells as social meeting places for patriarchs
2. Laban's two daughters: Leah ('weak eyes') and Rachel ('lovely in form')

B. Seven Years of Labor for Rachel

1. Bartering labor for marriage agreement
2. Distinction between love and lust: willingness to wait over time
3. 'Seven years seemed like only a few days because of his love for her'

V. The Deceiver Gets Deceived: Wedding Night Switch

A. Laban's Trickery

1. Veiled brides and pitch-dark Bedouin goat-hair tents
2. Morning discovery: Leah in place of Rachel

B. Emotional and Ethical Realities

1. Perspective of Leah: heartbreak of morning rejection
2. Irony of lex talionis: Jacob the deceiver falls victim to deception

C. Polygamy and Historical Narrative Principles

1. Additional seven years of labor for Rachel (14 years total)
2. Hermeneutical distinction: Descriptive (what happened) vs. Prescriptive (normative law)
3. Unvarnished honesty of Scripture: recording patriarchs' sin, warts, and flaws

VI. Sibling Rivalry, Mandrakes, and Birth of the Twelve Tribes

A. Divine Favor for the Unloved Wife

1. God opens Leah's womb (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah) while Rachel remains barren
2. God's pattern of siding with the underdog

B. The Mandrake Incident

1. Reuben brings mandrakes during wheat harvest; Ancient Near Eastern fertility belief (ancient aphrodisiac)
2. Rachel barter's night with Jacob for mandrakes
3. Scriptural truth: God opens Rachel's womb to bear Joseph, not the plant

C. Birth of Benjamin and Rachel's Death

1. Benjamin ('Son of my right hand'): symbol of honor in Near Eastern culture
2. Rachel's death in childbirth outside Bethlehem and her roadside memorial
3. Prophetic echoes: Jeremiah's Babylonian exile and Matthew's massacre of infants under Herod

D. Rachel Stealing the Family Gods (Teraphim)

1. Rachel hides 6-inch household gods under saddle, citing 'manner of women'
2. Motives: inheritance claims vs. lingering idolatry/fertility superstition

VII. Jacob at Peniel: Wrestling Match and Esau's Reconciliation

A. Approaching Esau at the Wadi Jabbok

1. Geography of Jabbok and Esau advancing from Edom with 400 men
2. Human reality of long-term harbored resentment (Herb King prison anecdote)
3. Jacob's fear and cowardice: dividing family, placing Leah/Rachel upfront, hiding in rear

B. Nocturnal Wrestling Match at Peniel

1. Solitary struggle; man unable to overpower Jacob until touching hip socket
2. Name change from Jacob ('Deceiver') to Israel ('He who struggles with God')
3. Peniel ('Face of God'): interpretation as a Christophany (pre-incarnate Christ)
4. Physical limp preventing escape, forcing Jacob to rely on God when facing Esau
5. Dietary prohibition note (Gen. 32:32) regarding hip tendon

C. Meeting Esau and Final Deception

1. Emotional embrace, tears, and reconciliation between brothers
2. Jacob lies again: promising to follow Esau to Edom but turning northwest to Shechem

VIII. Interlude: Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Bethel Purging

A. Esau's Lineage: The Edomites

1. Historical enmity between Edomites and Jews (Book of Obadiah)
2. King Herod the Idumean (Edomite): marriage to Mariamne, murder of family, architectural excess

B. Origins of Moab and Ammon

1. Lot's incestuous lineage with daughters after Sodom's fall
2. Moab ('From father'): ancestral line of Ruth and Jesus Christ

3. Ammon: origin of Ammonites in modern Jordan

C. Jacob's Return to Bethel

1. Purging household foreign idols (moving from henotheism to full allegiance)
2. Final reaffirmation of Israel name and Abrahamic covenant promises

IX. Key Tribes of Israel and Dark Interludes

A. Four Critical Tribes Highlighted

1. Levi: Priestly line (Moses, Aaron, Tabernacle service)
2. Judah: Royal line (David, Southern Kingdom kings, Messiah)
3. Joseph: Northern Kingdom leader (split into Ephraim and Manasseh)
4. Benjamin: First king (Saul) and New Testament Apostle Paul (Saul)

B. The Rape of Dinah (Gen. 34)

1. Shechem violates Dinah; Jacob's passive silence
2. Brothers' grief and fury; treacherous circumcision requirement
3. Levi and Simeon's violent slaughter of the town

C. Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38)

1. Canaanite marriages, death of Ur, and Onan's sin against Levirate marriage law
2. Tamar disguises as prostitute, securing Judah's signet ring and staff
3. Exposure of Judah and inclusion of Tamar in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1)

D. Literary Function of Dark Interludes

1. Demonstrating corruption and disqualification of older brothers (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah)
2. Preparing literary focus to shift to Joseph

X. The Joseph Narrative: Wisdom, Integrity, and Divine Providence

A. Comparative Parallels Between Jacob and Joseph

1. Elevation of younger brother over corrupt older siblings
2. Sibling rivalry fueled by parental favoritism (coat of many colors)
3. 20-year separation from family and prosperity in foreign land
4. Final reconciliation with estranged family

B. Joseph as a Model of Wisdom Literature

1. Cinderella/Fairytale structural archetype: rise from lowest status (prison) to ruler of kingdom
2. Moral integrity: resisting Potiphar's wife (warning against wild woman in Proverbs 5 & 7)
3. Dream interpretation (Pharaoh's 7 years of plenty and famine; parallels with Daniel)
4. Egyptian 'silent man' motif: hiding emotions and exercising self-control

C. Theological Climax: Divine Redemptive Providence

1. Brothers' fear of retribution after Jacob's death
2. Joseph's declaration: 'You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good' (Gen. 50:20)
3. Reversal motif: God transforming human evil into redemptive salvation