



Lesson 3: Israel: One who Wrestles with God and Men

Genesis 25-35

The Bible Challenge

A daily guide to reading the Bible in a year

The Big Picture

An Outline of Genesis*

Purpose: To teach the Israelites that leaving Egypt and possessing Canaan was God's design for his people.

Genesis 50:24: *"And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."*

Structure:

- I. Primeval Times (1-11)
- II. Early Patriarchal Times (12-36)
- III. Joseph's times (37-50)

Yahweh is a God who makes promises and fulfills those promises. The Israelites should believe in Yahweh.

Structure of the Jacob narrative:

- A Abraham fathers Isaac (25.19)
- B Struggle in Rebekah and sons of Isaac (25.20-34)
- C Promise to Isaac in Gerar (26.1-5)
- D Abimelech and attack on the sister/bride (26.6-16)
- E Isaac digs wells and builds an altar (26.17-25)
- F Isaac and Abimelech are reconciled/separation of the seed (26.26-35)
- G Jacob "wrestles" with Isaac for the blessing (27.1-29)
- H Struggle between Jacob and Esau (27.30-46)
- I Fleeing, blessing, sending *to Laban*, and struggles with the rival (28.1-9)
- J Blessing of God at Bethel (28.10-22)
- K Struggle for the wives (29.1-30)
- K' Struggle between the wives (29.31-30.24)
- J' Blessing of God within Laban's house (30.25-43)
- I' Fleeing, blessing, sending *from Laban* back to the land, and struggles with the rival (31.1-55)
- H' Struggle between Jacob and Esau (32.1-21)
- G' Jacob wrestles with God for the blessing (32.22-32)
- F' Esau and Jacob are reconciled/separation of the seed (33.1-17)
- E' Jacob builds an altar (33.18-20)
- D' Shechem and attack on the sister/bride (34.1-31)
- C' Promise to Jacob at Bethel (35.1-15)
- B' Struggle of Rachel and sons of Jacob (35.16-26)
- A' Isaac dies (35.27-29)



Jacob is in constant struggle against culture and Primogeniture rights.”

--B. Waltke, Genesis, p. 353

Primogeniture - an exclusive right of inheritance belonging to the eldest son.

“Primogeniture is the linchpin of the entire social and legal system which defines rights and privileges and provides a way around internecine disputes. But that same practice which protects the order of society is also a way of destining some to advantage and others to disadvantage.”

--Brueggaman, Genesis, p. 209

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Jacob's Name

Jacob is originally named for his heel-grabbing deception. He takes Esau's place in primacy of blessing and inheritance. Later, after having his own hip struck by God, Jacob is renamed Israel. He is now named, Israel "He wrestles with God."

Jacob is the man who wrestles with Men and YHWH. The entire story is one of struggle and faithfulness.

Conflict in the Jacob Story

Jacob vs. Esau

Esau is Jacob's twin brother. Herod was a descendant of Esau.

Esau despising his birthright is a sort of rejection of his father and YHWH. Jacob's receiving of the blessing incites Esau to anger. (27:30-46) He swears to kill Jacob. Later it appears that Esau has had a change of mind, as he forgives Jacob and Jacob blesses Esau. This resolves the brother-brother strife and sets things right. (33:1-17) The separation of the "seed of Isaac" was at first because of strife and later in peace and blessing.

Jacob vs. Laban

Laban is Jacob's father-in-Law.

Laban's passion for his "household gods" (see 31:33) By contrast, Jacob and his entire household 'put away' all foreign gods because of his allegiance to the one true God, YHWH. (35:2-4)

Laban is used as an instrument of discipline for Jacob. While with Laban (20 years), he was consistently deceived by Laban over wives and wealth. Jacob (the deceiver) was consistently the person of integrity.

Jacob meets Laban but is deceived by him into marrying Leah and thus owing seven more years of labor for Rachel. In chapter 31, Jacob and Rachel "trick" Laban, and Jacob rebukes Laban and strikes up an agreement for his safe passage.

God showed Jacob that he would be blessed not by deception but by faithfulness to and trust in YHWH.



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Leah vs. Rachel

Leah and Rachel compete for Jacob's affection by producing children. Amidst the competition between Leah and Rachel, God remembers Rachel and removes her reproach. Joseph will be used by God for good for "the saving of many lives."

The Attacks on the Sister-Wives

Sarah, Rebekah and Dinah are all examples of the enmity between the Serpent and the woman from Genesis 3:15

The Abimelech story appears in the midst of the Jacob and Esau narrative. It is the only place where the adult Isaac takes a central role. He recapitulates Abraham's deception of Abimelech, as Abimelech once again seeks to attack the sister-bride.

The sister-bride is again attacked in the Dinah incident, however, Shechem seeks to make things right, and when Jacob's sons take out vengeance through deception, and they make him obnoxious to all the other tribes of the land. This is an anti-deception scene compared to the other sister-wife attacks, rather than resulting in the usual spoils, it creates an opportunity for future harm.

Jacob vs. God

While fleeing Esau, Jacob meets God as a friend at Bethel. While fleeing Laban and just prior to meeting Esau again, Jacob meets God as a foe at Peniel.

It is striving and wrestling with YHWH that Jacob's name is changed from "Heel-grabber/deceiver" to "One who wrestles with God and man and prevails."

Theological Considerations

Divine Election and Covenant Renewal

"God's continual overthrow of primogeniture rights in Genesis signifies God's sovereign control and gracious election witnessed in the words of Christ to his disciples. On this basis, Paul explains the election of the Gentiles over the Jews, who had all the natural advantages to appreciate Christ (Romans 9-11). All praise accrues to God, who does "whatever pleases him" (Ps. 115:3)

Genesis 31:²⁸ Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you" (John 15:16)



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Mercy, Blessing and Faith

Throughout the narrative Jacob is taught that he does not have to live according to the deceptive culture. But rather by trusting in YHWH and his promise to provide he will ultimately be blessed. That does not mean that Jacob was sinless. He was a deceiver. God had mercy on Jacob.

Theophany and Sanctuary

YHWH continues to reveal himself to the Patriarchs. YHWH appeared to Isaac at Gerar in (26:2-6) Jacob's vision of the stairway to heaven at Bethel (28:10-22) and the wrestling with God at Peniel (32:22-32).

At Bethel, a nameless place becomes "House of God" and a rock pillow becomes the capstone of a pillar/altar.

The Spread of the Kingdom

Matthew 8:1 – 13:53

The Spread of the Kingdom (Matthew 8:1-11:13:53)

Narrative: Matthew 8:1-9:38 Jesus' Miracles and Reactions

A Leper: 8:1-4

A Centurion's Servant: 8:5-13

Peter's Mother-in-Law: 8:14-17

A Storm: 8:18-27

Two Demoniacs: 8:28-34

A Paralytic: 9:1-8

Tax Collectors and Sinner: 9:9-17

A Girl and a Woman: 9:18-26

Two Blind Men: 9:27-31

A Demoniac: 9:32-34

Jesus' Compassion: 9:35-38

Jesus displays his power over: demonic evil, sickness, sinners and even chaos in nature.

Matthew called attention to the crowds' reactions to Jesus' power: Opposition, Fear, Willful Rejection, Worship and Faith.



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Discourse: Matthew 10:1-11:1 Emissaries of the King

Jesus commanded his followers to pray for God to raise up evangelists and leaders.

Jesus extended his personal kingdom ministry by empowering twelve disciples for ministry.

Jesus commanded them to announce the presence of the kingdom.

Signs and Parables: Matthew 11:2-13:53

Narrative: 11:2-12:50 Signs and Reactions

John the Baptist: 11:2-19

City Crowds: 11:20-30

Healing on Sabbath: 12:1-21

Power of Beelzebub: 12:22-37

Sign of Jonah: 12:38-50

Key Question: Are the expectations of Israel correct?

Jesus faced continuing rejection by the religious leaders because he was not the Messiah that they were expecting. They would see the sign of Jonah: Discipline for themselves and mercy for the Gentiles.

Discourse: Matthew 13:1-53 Kingdom Parables

The Sower: 13:1-23

The Weeds: 13:24-30

The Mustard Seed and Yeast: 13:31-43

The Hidden Treasure and Pearl: 13:44-45

The Net: 13:47-53

The Kingdom of God would manifest fruit in the midst of evil. Jesus taught that the nature of the kingdom of God was progressive and in accordance to the Word of God.

Jesus taught that the kingdom of heaven was of supreme value and was to be sought at all cost.

*John the Baptist asks,
"Are you the one to come
or should we look for
another?"*