

Dr. Elaine Phillips, OT History, Lit., and Theology, Lecture 8

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Preliminaries and Prayer

Review

Well, let's carry right into just a bit of a review from last time, because to move on to Isaac and Jacob, we need to just remind ourselves of the things that we were talking about with regard to Isaac. We're not going to spend a lot of time with Isaac, but on the other hand, one of the key things that happened to him is that he willingly offered himself, if you want to put it in those terms, when Abraham was commanded by God to offer Isaac as a burnt offering at the region of Moriah. We talked about some of the possible parallels between Isaac and Jesus going to the region of Moriah, which as we know is Jerusalem. And particularly the mountains of Moriah will be in the area where the temple later on gets built. And then, of course, we have Isaac as very clearly, Abraham's son, only son, beloved son, Isaac, coming through in here. Isaac even goes so far as to carry the wood as they are going on up there, parallel, possibly, to Jesus carrying the cross. Again, how far you push the adumbrations is up to you, but I don't think we want to lose sight of them because they are very interesting. And then, of course, there's a key substitution that's made, when the ram is substituted as well.

Just keep in mind the map stuff that we've been over now multiple times. For our purposes today, what we're really interested in is going to be the area right in here, the Negev area, because Isaac and Abraham earlier had been located in the Negev on the fringes of Canaanite territory. Hebron's going to be important, Shechem, Dothan, these places that are right here in our hill country region. And as Jacob flees from the ire of his brother, Esau, he's going to go up this direction [north], going to Paddan Aram, going back to the home land, if you will.

Isaac as Hinge

When we think of Isaac, I'd like you to think of him as a hinge. And as you know, a hinge is what holds together things that are bigger. So on the one side you have a door and on the other side you have a wall, and there is the hinge in-between. If you want to think of that figure, we have Abraham on one side. He is father of the covenant people, and we've been through that last time in terms of God's articulations of the covenant to him. Notice in chapter 23, that when Sarah, Abraham's wife, dies at the age of 127, Abraham buys a plot of land from Ephron the Hittite, and so therefore he has now got land. It's a tiny parcel, but nevertheless it is the beginnings of what's going to become the whole land grant.

And of course, on the other side of the hinge, we've got Jacob, with whom we're going to spend a fair amount of time today. Jacob, as we're going to see in chapter 32, gets renamed "Israel," and there are some interesting issues with regard to that. Then he will have the twelve sons who will become the tribes of Israel itself. Let me spend a couple more minutes here on "the hinge" with things we want to know about Isaac. We talked about his being bound on the altar. He also, by arrangement of his father and his father's servant, who makes a trip to find Rebekah, marries Rebekah. There are three things I want to say about this narrative. Someone asked the question last time about the symbolism of putting the hand under the thigh with the oath. Basically, "under the thigh" is a euphemism for genitals. What's being said there when Abraham says put your hand under my thigh and take an oath, is that he is referring to the source of life. Most important, this promise is for seed; this promise is for progeny; this promise is that there is going to be a whole line that is going to be forthcoming, so in that context this oath takes on significant meaning. Abraham says "You need to get a wife for my son so that the promise can continue." There are a lot of questions, by the way, on how to understand that, but I think that's probably the best way to read it.

Second thing I want to say about that marriage chapter is this. Did you notice how long it was? This chapter goes on and on and on, doesn't it? And first of all you have all the things that happen, and then the servant gets there and he repeats the whole thing all over again, lots of detail. That's not just happenstance. When you have that kind of thing happening in a narrative, something must be important about it.

We're to know that this is by God's design, and one of the literary ways of showing that is repetition of the events. It's almost like at the mouth of two witnesses, a theme that we're going to see multiple times again. But the text itself is giving multiple witnesses to the fact that this is God's choice in terms of a wife for Isaac.

Now the third thing we want to say about this: I hope you also noticed what kind of a woman Rebekah is. When that servant comes, how many camels has he got in his train behind him? Did you notice that little detail? I think it's ten. He's got multiple camels. If a camel has been going for a fair amount of time without water, it is going to drink up to 25 gallons of water in one fell swoop. So as the text is saying, she was watering these camels. She's going back and forth and back and forth and back and forth, doing this, because if it's ten camels, it's 250 gallons of water. That takes a little bit of effort, and Rebekah shows right away that she's someone with a certain amount of energy. She's also someone who seems to manifest a certain amount of adventuresome spirit, because she's willing to go right away with these people, off into a land that she doesn't know.

The final thing that we want to say about this narrative: Right at the end of chapter 24, in verse 67, when she gets there, Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah. He married her, and she became his wife, and he loved her. That statement doesn't appear very often. I think Dr. Wilson in his book emphasizes that a little bit. Isaac loved her. We will see an interesting marriage relationship with these two. Notice, of the three patriarchs, this is the one where there is only one wife. The others have other things going on with concubines and multiple wives in Jacob's case.

During Isaac's life, we also have the promise renewed several times. In other words, the promise that God made to Abraham is rearticulated to Isaac, so we know that there is an ongoing promise and continuity in this. And then, we have him participating in the events of Jacob and Esau's lives at which we're going to look in a moment. Just a quick aside, Abraham does have other sons as we read in chapter 25. He will father Ishmael and Midian, and some other folks as well. That's going to be important when we start talking about the Ishmaelites and the Midianites, but that will

happen, well actually, it's going to happen later today, I keep forgetting we're compressing lectures here.

The Births of Jacob and Esau

First off, I'll focus on Jacob. One of the things that you're going to see as we look through this story, is it's so fraught with tension. Jacob's story is a story of tension; it's a story of conflict. There's a lot of pain involved in here, and in essence, all the blessings that appear to be given to Jacob, he doesn't really have for a majority of his life, because of all these horrible things that are happening. At the same time, God's going to keep intervening, and he'll confront Jacob at times, certainly with that wrestling match. So watch these two factors [God's intervention and human conflict] be interwoven; this is great narrative.

First of all, the birth and the prophecy: Here again we have a case of a barren woman. Does this begin to sound like a theme? And it's not the only one; it's going to continue. One of the subtexts here is, I would suggest, that we're to know that this chosen line of chosen people is very clearly by God's design, because the women are barren until God intervenes. There's a prayer offered, and there's some interpretive things in this case. God's intervening here. It takes 20 years, if I remember correctly. Isaac is 40 years old in chapter 25 verse 10; he's 60 years old when Rebekah births the twins. So again, they're waiting for a while. And as you know from reading this story, even in the birth process we've got some tension going on, don't we? Verse 24 chapter 25, "When the time came for her to give birth there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red and his whole body was like a hairy garment and they named him Esau. After this his brother came out with his hand grasping Esau's heel." So you can, already, in that story, from a literary perspective, just see the beginnings of tension in terms of this grasping. The name Jacob is Ya'akov in Hebrew, and it means "to grasp" or "grab" or "hold on to." It will come also to have the meaning of "deceit." And both of those fit fairly well.

God's Response to Rebekah's Inquiry

Well that gets us to the inquiry that Rebekah makes of the Lord. I want to read this as well. Rebekah was pregnant after Isaac prays for her, and in verse 22, it says, “the babies jostled each other within her, and she says, ‘why is this happening?’” So she goes to inquire and here’s the Lord’s statement. Now maybe you know all this already but we got to kind of focus on this. “Two nations are in your womb. Two peoples from within you will be separated. One will be stronger than the other [and the last line, of course, is the punch line] and the older will serve the younger.” Okay, the older will serve the younger. Why is that important?

There are at least two reasons why is that important. This won’t be the only or the last case where the younger is put ahead of the older, but this one is particularly important. The apostle Paul, in Romans chapter 9, makes this very point. He says, in order that God’s purposes in election might stand, Rebekah was told when her children were born “the older will serve the younger” so that they wouldn’t have deeds by which to boast. In other words, someone isn’t going to be able to say, “Oh, I chose God.” It’s not that kind of thing. Or, “I’m so good that God had to choose me.” It’s before they were born that God made this choice, and Paul makes that point very clear.

This statement is also important for another reason. As we read the text, we get the impression that Isaac and Rebekah have a decent sort of relationship. How do we know? Well, when Isaac has an encounter with the king of the Philistines (kind of mirroring what Abraham had done earlier with regard to claiming Sarah as his sister), after hearing from Isaac that Rebekah was his sister, the Philistine king looks out and sees Isaac caressing Rebekah! Interestingly enough, the word is *metzaheq*, which goes along with his name, Isaac, *‘itzhaq*. At any rate, that tells us that there’s something intimate about their relationship. And now, why am I saying that? Because I would suggest that when the Lord made this very clear declaration to Rebekah with regard to the nature of these two twins that are going to be born, she’s probably shared that information with Isaac. It would be kind of hard to keep it quiet. So both of them (I know I’m reading between the lines, but I think it’s a fair reading between the lines), both of them were fully aware of the nature of this prophetic statement made to Rebecca, which is, at the bottom line, the older is going to serve the younger. Now

keep that in your mind when we get to chapter 27, and what Isaac does in terms of his attempts to offer the blessing to Esau. I would suggest he's directly countering what he knew to be the intent of God in that, but we'll get to that in a moment.

Jacob's Character

Let me say a couple of things about Jacob. First of all, as I said a moment ago, the term *Ya'acov*, or Jacob, does indeed mean "to grasp" the heel, but it does come to imply deception. And so there is a pattern of lying and deceit through most of his adult life. The huge question is, was he a nasty little critter to start with? Well, there's debate on that, by the way. I think your NIV doesn't do this justice, if I remember correctly. Chapter 25, verse 7: "the boys grew up. Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country. Jacob was a quiet man." That's the NIV's translation of this Hebrew expression. '*Ish* means "man," and '*ish tam* means "whole, complete." A person of integrity is implied or intended by *tam*. That statement is being said with regard to Jacob early on. As we know, when his mother first suggested the scheme to set right Isaac's misguided notion of blessing Esau, Jacob was pretty wary about it. He was concerned. Now maybe he was concerned for his own skin, but nevertheless, he's not altogether in favor of what she persuaded him to do. We'll come back to that in a moment. So again, just like Jacob, we've got a mixture of faith and faithfulness (the '*ish tam* kind of thing), but we are also wrestling with some of those other fallen parts of our nature.

Jacob Gets Esau's Birthright

We've got to say something about the birthright, too. This is what's going on at the end of chapter 25. Jacob was cooking some stew. Esau comes in and says "I'm hungry. Quick, let me have some of that...." Well, what does your NIV say? "...red stew." Nice translation. (I'm trying to get you to take Hebrew.) What Esau is asking for is some of that "red, red." Give me some of that "red, red." Now we learn that Jacob's actually cooking lentil stew. It might have a red color to it. But Esau is asking for some of that "red, red," and some commentators suggest that maybe he's thinking that this is something that has to do with some kind of blood sacrificial pagan ritual that he thinks Jacob's involved in, and he's asking to be part of it. I don't know that,

I'm just saying that it's an odd two word expression and that may be what's going on. At any rate, Jacob says, sell me your birthright. As we see, especially when we read Hebrews chapter 12, Esau says, "What good is the birthright to me?" And so Jacob gives him some bread, and then it says that he gives him some lentil stew, which is not what Esau was asking for and probably not what Esau was expecting.

Anyway, he eats, he drinks, gets up, he leaves, and then it says, "he despised his birthright." What is he despising? The birthright seemed to involve some of the following things, and hang on to this, because this is going to be important not only to Jacob and Esau. This will be important later on as well. First, it meant double inheritance. If there are two kids, then the father's inheritance is divided into three parts, and the older gets two of those three parts. Well, that's kind of unfair. That's a monumental amount of money, right? The birthright also meant leadership and power. In this wider cultural context, in Hebrew culture at large, you just didn't have small families. You had extended families. It's called the *mishpahah*, the level right before clan. So it's an extended family, and there are servants involved. This is an expensive proposition to be the person that has leadership over this, and part of this double inheritance seemed to have been intended in order to meet the financial obligations of being that head. The birthright also seems to have involved some religious significance. As we see Esau, however, the closing statement in chapter 25 says he "despised the birthright." And Hebrews chapter 12 has some very sobering things to say about Esau's despising the birthright. We can look at that a little later on. It leads to some further things towards the end of chapter 12 that have to do with fearing the Lord.

The Plots to Give and Receive Isaac's Blessing

It's important to note that birthright and blessing are two separate things. Now, let's look at the plot to receive the blessing, and for that matter, to give the blessing. The first thing we need to keep in our minds is what I was trying to say a little bit earlier. Neither Isaac nor Rebekah is lily white in this proposition, because, as I suggested, Isaac is intentional about giving a blessing to Esau, and we know that Esau is Isaac's favorite. Why do we say this? If you turn over to chapter 27, Jacob comes into Isaac's presence, and Isaac thinks he's Esau. Notice what it says, I'm starting at

verse 27, “Ah, the smell of my son.” Verse 28: “May God give you heaven’s dew, heaven’s riches.” Verse 29 is the real key here, “May nations serve you, peoples bow down before you, be lord over your brothers.” Again, even though Isaac most likely knew the content of the prophetic statement in response to Rebekah’s inquiry, he makes this statement to the person he thinks is Esau. And so he’s intending to do that. It’s not just a blessing. It’s a blessing particularly to put Esau first.

Now of course, Rebekah isn’t any better, because she arranges the whole scheme of deception and tells Jacob, I’ll cook the stuff and you go in there and get the blessing, because you’re supposed to have it. She knew he was supposed to have it. So Jacob participates and begins, if he hasn’t already begun, to enter into that life pattern of deceiving people, which he continues to do. It’s a very interesting thing. The blessing pronounced by Isaac to the person he thought was Esau, “Rule over your brothers,” is a pretty sobering statement. When Esau does show up, Isaac “trembled violently.” It could be out of anger, because he’s been duped, or it could be fear, recognizing that something bigger is going on here, and the plans that he had to sort of rearrange God’s idea, aren’t working terribly well. But at any rate, Esau says, “Please bless me.” And Esau also says, “Isn’t he rightly named Jacob?” Verse 36: He’s deceived me these two times, took my birthright, now he’s taken my blessing! Isaac, verse 37. “I’ve made him lord over you Esau; I’ve made all of his relatives his servants, etc.” What can I do? Well, Esau pleads for a blessing and here is the blessing. “Your dwelling will be away from earth’s riches, away from the dew of heaven. You’re going to live by the sword. You’re going to serve your brother. When you grow restless, you will throw off his yoke from your neck.” Not a very pleasant sort of blessing, is it?

Blessings had prophetic significance. They really did back then, and we see the descendants of Esau, the Edomites, certainly carrying on this kind of relationship with the descendants of Jacob, the Israelites. It will be a source of tension for a long time, so it’s not just a brothers’ thing.

Well, one more thing we need to say in this regard. Of course, Esau is out to get revenge, and the word gets around to Rebekah that Esau would absolutely love to kill Jacob, and so she persuades him to flee, obviously to go back and get a wife,

that's part of the explanation to Isaac. But notice the real tragedy here, he's gotten both birthright and blessing and he's going away entirely empty-handed as a fugitive, and, the other sad, very poignant part of this whole thing is, he's never going to see his mother again. She'll never see him again. These circumstances have worked out so that the family fractures at that point, because she's going to be dead before Jacob returns. So it's a real family tragedy at this point.

[questions and responses]

Jacob's Dream at Bethel

Well, we've got Jacob fleeing. Of course, the next thing that happens is a very interesting encounter. He goes north. We know the place, Bethel, already. And as he stops there, he spends the night with his head on a rock. Verse 12 of chapter 28 says he had a dream, and he saw a stairway resting on the earth with its top reaching to heaven. The angels, what are angels in this whole economy of God's servants? You know what the word means? Yes, it means "messenger." So we've got God's messengers basically between heaven and earth descending on this stairway. Part of what Jacob is to see is that God has ways of watching out for him, and now that's going to involve this kind of protection. Above it or perhaps on it or perhaps beside it, depending on how you translate that Hebrew preposition, stood the Lord, and he makes a promise. "I'm the Lord, the God of your father Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob; I will give you and your descendants the land." And he also talks about numbers of descendants, so the promise of God is reiterated here.

In turn, Jacob makes his own "promise." It's kind of conditional - at the end of that chapter. "If God will be with me and will watch over me on the journey I am taking, give me food to eat and clothes to wear so I can return safely to my father's house..." Notice all the conditions? "Then the Lord will be my God. This stone I've set up will be a pillar in God's house." Bethel, by the way, Beth-el means "house of God," so we've got an interesting etymology going on there, a story that explains this naming thing. "And of all that you give me I will give you a tenth." Notice, God's promise is unconditional, he's just saying this is going to be the way it's going to be, the promise I made to Abraham, to Isaac, is going to be carried on through you. Jacob

seems to be still a little bit skeptical at this point.

Well, we need to also take a quick turn over to the gospel of John. Let's look and see what's going on in John chapter 1. Jesus has been baptized, John has said, "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Jesus' first disciples seem to find him and seek him out and see what's going on with this person, and Andrew, in verse 40 says, "we've found the Messiah!" And then Peter comes. The next day (starting with verse 43), Jesus decides to leave for Galilee. He says to Philip, "Follow me." Phillip finds Nathaniel, and tells him, "we've found the one Moses wrote about in the Torah, and the prophets also wrote about - Jesus of Nazareth." Now Nathaniel is kind of an interesting character. He's a bit of a skeptic. "Nazareth? Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Now there are some reasons why he might say that; you'll get into those in New Testament probably. Notice in verse 47, Jesus says, "Here's a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false." Do you catch the allusion there? An Israelite, a descendant of Jacob, has this whole history of deceit built into the national epic, if you will. And Jesus is saying, this guy, Nathaniel, he's an Israelite, but there is nothing deceitful about him. He speaks without guile.

But that, of course, isn't the main point of the story. That's just an aside regarding the Jacob-Israel connection. When Nathaniel says, how do you know me? Jesus says, "I saw you while you were still standing under the fig tree." And then Nathaniel says, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!" And Jesus says, "You're going to see greater things." Verse 51 is really our punch line here. "I tell you" (and the word "you" there is plural now, it's not just Nathaniel), "I tell you the truth, you're going to see heaven open..." and the angels of God aren't going to be going up and down on a stairway. "They're going to be going up and down on the Son of Man himself," Jesus's chosen name for himself. In other words, Jesus is going to be the means of access between heaven and earth. The connection here is an important one, because of Jacob's dream, and what Jesus will do with it when he makes that incredible promise with regard to his mission and ministry.

Jacob's Sojourn in Paddan Aram

Well, Jacob's gone a good long time, almost a generation. He fathers a bunch

of kids. By the way, if you see the genealogies, I think it's in Exodus, Jacob seems to have 33 children, so there's a lot of women that are born there as well. The only one we know about is a woman named Dinah, because she gets herself into an interesting situation with a guy named Shechem. But, for our purposes we're going to focus on the twelve sons.

It's no question that Jacob was a deceiver, and we've just seen his deceit along with his mother's. He will, however, meet his match in Uncle Laban. Laban not only does this interesting shifting around between Leah and Rachel, which is, of course, deceit enough, and certainly hurts that whole family enough, but Laban will change Jacob's wages, 10 times, Jacob says. It also indicates that Laban seems to have his own nasty self-serving designs when Jacob proposes this scheme about speckled and spotted sheep. The way Laban handles this, is to first grab all those animals that Jacob said would be his (and they were specifically colored in order to know), and he takes them for himself and moves away three-days' journey. So Laban is a crook. [Thus, even though the matter about breeding the sheep in front of rods is odd, to say the least, that's not the main point.]

Jacob's Sons

Here are the guys you need to know if you don't know them already. Born to Leah were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah. Each one of those has a very distinct importance to them. Reuben, as you know, is the firstborn. But what happens to him? Why does he lose his first-born rights? What does he do to lose his first-born rights? He sleeps with his father's concubine, right? And therefore, because he's turbulent as the waters (as the blessing at the end of Genesis says), those rights are removed. To whom do they go? Who takes over the firstborn rights? Joseph will get the first-born rights at this point. In other words, the first-born son of the next wife, not the next in order, but the first-born son of Rachel. Simeon and Levi we know because they distinguish themselves, unfortunately, by slaughtering the inhabitants of Shechem. Why? because their sister, who is also born to Leah, so she was a full sister, had been raped.

The blessing at the end of Genesis is going to refer to all three of these incidents. It's going to say Reuben loses the rights of firstborn because he's been

turbulent, defiling his father's bed. Simeon and Levi are going to be scattered, the blessing says, because of what they did in their violence. Interestingly enough, when they end up in the land, Simeon is sort of diffusely settled, not with specific boundaries, in the southern area of the tribe of Judah. Levi is going to have a set of cities, scattered throughout the entirety of the land of Israel. So that blessing also becomes a sort of a prophetic statement.

Judah has some interesting situations as well, as you know from Genesis 38. He's the one who really wrongs his daughter-in-law Tamar because he deprives her of the rightful person who would come and fulfill the marriage if a brother dies. Here's the situation: two of Judah's sons die. They were her husbands and Judah should have given her the third one to raise up children. Judah refuses to do so because he's afraid. And then, Tamar disguises herself as a temple prostitute. Judah sleeps with her. He's about to have her burned in punishment when he finds out she's pregnant, and, lo and behold, she produces the evidence that the child is his. And of course, it's through that line [that the ruler comes]. Genesis 49 is going to tell us that there is something very important about the line of Judah. The scepter will not depart from that particular person, so we know that the king is going to come from the line of Judah.

Issachar and Zebulun don't have nearly as much prominence, so we don't need to say a whole lot about them here. Joseph was born to Rachel; after all sorts of anguish of being childless, she'll finally have Joseph, and she will die having Benjamin, her second son. Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher are born to the handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah. Just know who they are; you don't need to know anything particular about them at this point. When we talk about settlement patterns with regard to the conquest, we'll do more with them.

Jacob and his Family Leave Paddan Aram

As Jacob planned to leave, we have his scheme with the livestock, and you know what? I don't understand how that was supposed to work, but let me just throw a couple of things into the picture here. First of all, as you read through these couple of chapters, Jacob refers to the fact that Laban uses divination. That probably linked into the household gods business as well, the *teraphim*. Secondly, as I said a moment ago, Laban is also a schemer himself. And so, right when this whole deal is kind of

made, it seems that Laban makes a real grab for things. I would suggest to you that what Jacob is doing with this mating in front of the poles, might be appealing to Laban's belief in divination, and letting Laban think, hey, you know, this is the mechanism. However, Jacob knows better; he says to his wives as they're leaving, "I had a dream" and "God revealed to me..." And so Jacob knows that something else is going on. It's God who is behind all this. But I think he might be kind of setting it up so that Laban gets the idea that it's a divinatory thing.

At any rate, as they go, Rachel runs off with the *teraphim*, the household gods. There is a lot of debate in terms of what this means. Does it really have to do with inheritance? Maybe. Does it really have to do with perhaps worship and divination and power in that sense? Maybe. I don't really know. It's an interesting study in and of itself. We're going to see that Jacob holds on to those *teraphim*. They're going to show up again.

One last confrontation between these people occurs when Jacob runs and Laban comes after him. It seems like the tendency to lie has sort of infiltrated throughout the family, because Rachel lies to her father in order to keep the *teraphim*. Verse 35 of chapter 31, when the tent is being searched, and she's sitting on these household gods, she says, "Don't be angry, my Lord. I can't stand up in your presence. I'm having my period." That would render her unclean, so he wouldn't dare touch the cushion on which she was seated in that state. And therefore, they go trotting off with the household gods. As Jacob leaves, he lets us know, and he also lets Laban know, that he's been serving Laban for 20 years (verse 38). All the things that have happened have been a source of friction and tension between them. So as they go their separate ways, Laban says, in verse 44, come now, let's make a treaty. (Covenant and treaty are the same word, remember?) Here they're making a treaty between two equal individuals. "Let's make a treaty, you and I. Let it serve as a witness between us." So they set up a pillar that is essentially to serve as a witness of a non-aggression pact between them. And so Jacob heads back toward Canaan.

Wrestling with God

Life is not perfect at this point, however, because he's now got to confront

Esau. Chapter 32 verse 22. That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, two maidservants, eleven sons, crossed the ford of the Jabbok, sent them across the stream, and sent over all his possessions. I mean, he has a whole entourage, so it takes some time to get all this done. Then he's left alone, and it says, "a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When he saw he couldn't overpower him he touched the socket of Jacob's hip, so his hip was wrenched. And then the man said, 'let me go, it's daybreak.' And Jacob says, 'I'm not going to let you go until you bless me.' The man says, what's your name? Jacob says 'Jacob,' and the man says, 'your name is no longer going to be Jacob. It will be Israel because you have struggled with God and with men and you have overcome.'" Jacob asks his name, he doesn't give it, but Jacob calls the place Peniel, because Jacob knows he's seen the face of God; that's what Peniel means, "face of or presence of God," and yet his life was spared.

Here are the interesting things to keep in mind here. Judaism uses this as kind of a paradigm for their ongoing wrestling with God. Think of *The Chosen* or some of the writings of A.J. Heschel. Questions and "wrestling" are part of their world view.

A second thing: this event shows that God is willing to limit himself. This wrestling match ends up with Jacob prevailing over the man, who we learned from Hosea chapter 12 is the angel of the Lord. From our Christian perspective, we see this in the incarnation and subsequent life and death of Jesus. Humankind (from the human perspective) prevails over Jesus and puts him to death. These are very interesting adumbrations.

Well, Jacob's name is changed to Israel, he receives the blessing, and then sees God face to face. (I know we're racing at a horrible rate. This won't happen again unless we have more snow days.) I've already mentioned the unsavory activities of Simeon and Levi, the revenge against the city of Shechem, and Reuben's defiling his father's bed by sleeping with his concubine.

Genesis chapter 36 is a genealogy, and you're thinking, "oh, I guess I'll just skip that. Boring." And true, we may not find lots of spiritual excitement out of a genealogy, but let me note two things for future reference. Notice first of all, that Esau, who's going to become Edom, settles in the hill country of Seir. That's down to the south and east of the south end of the Dead Sea or the Sea of Salt. And then there

are going to be some names that we just want to keep in the backs of our minds. We don't need them right away, but put them away for future reference. In verse 10, a guy named Eliphaz is mentioned. That's going to be important for the book of Job. And in verse 12, somebody named Amalek, father of the Amalekites, is also going to be mentioned.

Moving on to the Joseph Narrative – Implications of Sovereignty

This moves to the next lecture outline. Here's where we're going to pick up on the issue of God's sovereignty. Sovereignty, of course, is woven through all of our biblical narratives, but we really see it with Joseph. So that's why it's important to bring it out and talk about it a little bit here. Thumbnail definition: sovereignty is God's exercising complete control over all circumstances, as he directs them according to his good will and pleasure. Romans 8:28 comes to our minds. Let me emphasize: All circumstances, directing them according to his good will and pleasure.

When we get to the end of Genesis, and the brothers of Joseph are scared to death that once their father is off the scene, Joseph is going to turn nasty all of a sudden, Joseph twice reassures them. I'd like to read these passages to you. First of all in chapter 45, Joseph reveals himself to the brothers. And he says, "don't be disturbed with yourselves for selling me here. It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you." That's verse 5, and then in verse 7, he reiterates it. "God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance." He's saving them from the famine, and they're delivered from the famine. But of course, this is going to be the beginnings of a long process that's going to end up in a deliverance at the Exodus, and redemption in that context. So there's something bigger going on here, and Joseph has a bit of a handle on the implications of what God has done. Chapter 50, verse 20, pretty much says the same thing. "You intended to harm me," Joseph says, "God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

One other thing I want to say, and this is a lesson for today. We often get into situations where forgiveness is absolutely necessary but we don't feel like doing it. No doubt you've all been there and you're all probably going to be there again when hurt

takes place and trust is broken and there's a lot of personal anguish. With God's help, if we forgive, that will root out this evil, ugly, bitterness that otherwise takes over and only rots away at you and me. Getting some kind of a handle on what sovereignty means, then, helps us recognize that God is going to use these things for his good purposes, however awful things are. And that may nudge us towards forgiveness and will certainly pull us out of the pit of bitterness.

Geographical Connections

We need to make some geographical connections as well. We're going to talk a whole lot more about Egypt, Lord willing, on Monday, and what's going on in the whole Egyptian context. But for our purposes, simply note that during this time period, there is an increase in people who are coming from the north and the east of Egypt, called Asiatics, into Egypt. So as we see Joseph coming down there, he's not a lone figure. There are other Asiatics who are coming as well. And there is all sorts of trade going back and forth. Ishmaelites and Midianites are part of this ongoing commercial trade. You may remember when we talked about the historical geography material, and I mentioned the importance of spice trade. The spice traders that Joseph got himself sold to were not an unusual phenomenon. That was an ongoing commercial enterprise, and so Joseph traveled with spice traders to Egypt. By this time, notice the matter of a couple generations; these descendants of Ishmael, these descendants of Midian, have multiplied--remember those were two sons of Abraham--enough so that they have clans that are functioning in this semi-nomadic spice trade enterprise.

The next thing we're going to do is look at a map. Joseph gets sold off at a place at Dothan. How did that happen? Hebron is where the family is located, the big, extended family. That's just off the map down right here. Seems like it was getting to be later in the summer. Remember our weather principles? Farther south, the dryer it is; the farther east, the dryer it is. Therefore, getting on into the summer when there's no rain, you're going to migrate to the north to try and get more crops. Here's where Shechem is located, right there. That's where Joseph initially tries to find the rest of the brothers, and what's he told? "Oh, they've moved on to Dothan.

Here's where Dothan is, right about here. So they've gone even farther north and west. They've moved from Shechem up here to Dothan.

Now why is that so important? Do you remember our international coastal highway? The International Coastal Highway comes up the coastal plain from Egypt. As it makes its way, it's got to get through this Mount Carmel range. There are three ways to do it. One goes here [to the northwest], one goes here [past Megiddo], the other swings around this way {Dothan Valley}. Now, the second thing you need to remember is the importance of the Trans-Jordanian Highway. The third thing is the trunk route connecting the Trans-Jordanian highway and the International Coastal Highway carrying all of the spice trade, among other commodities. The trunk route swings right past Dothan and on down to Egypt. Even the geography is part of God's sovereign design because Joseph is sitting there [in Dothan] in a cistern when the brothers decided they better not kill him after all. He is sold off to this caravan of traders on their way to Egypt. God's sovereign purposes work all things out for good.

Literary Issues

There are a couple literary issues to note. Just remember this story when we start talking about the Book of Esther near the end of the semester. We will revisit this at that time. There are some similarities. And then in your *Old Testament Parallels* there is the story of Anubis and Bata. I'm not going to wax so long on the Judah narrative. Usually I ask lots of questions in terms of why is it here and why it interrupts the narrative that started in ch 37 – but we're wrestling with the clock this term.

Brief Observations on the Joseph Narrative

We do want to think about the Joseph narrative in terms of God's preparation of Joseph, including his time as prisoner. (This is all in your lecture outline.) Just several highlights: Think in terms of the long robe that Jacob gave to him. Remember the material about inheritance that we talked about, when God clothed Adam and Eve as a signal that he was indeed recognizing them as children? Clothing has importance. This robe is even more than that. The Hebrew term a special word; it only shows up

again in the Hebrew Bible with reference to one of David's daughters, in a story we're going to come to later on when we study David. So, there seems to be something pretty remarkable about this robe; it's probably symbolic of the fact that Joseph has now gotten the first-born rights. And that would not make his brothers terribly happy if he's flaunting it, especially since his brothers are older.

We also have the dreams which indicate that they're all going to be bowing down to him. That also doesn't go over terribly well. And finally, we see what happens at Dothan. He's also a favorite slave of Potiphar until, of course, Potiphar's wife likes him so much, that she frames him, gets him into trouble, and then he's a prisoner. And as a prisoner, he has a series of opportunities to interpret dreams again. Notice Joseph and dreams. Notice the two-ness, two witnesses in these two dreams, multiple dreams of Pharaoh, multiple dreams of the butler, the baker, multiple dreams of Joseph earlier, two witnesses on these things. Advice to Pharaoh and appointment to the ruling position, and we know what happens after that, don't we? The brothers come; you know that story.

And with my apologies for a very much abbreviated lecture! If nothing else, I hope you will ponder the implications of God's sovereignty in regard to dealing with potential bitterness.

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