



Class Notes

Jacob

Genesis 25:19-37:1

Dr. Tim Mackie

What happens when the promised snake-crushing seed of the woman starts acting like a snake? God's chosen human partner schemes and strives to grasp at power and prosperity at every turn, yet God still works in and through him. Follow Jacob through a lifetime of deceit and sacrifice as he struggles to trust God for the blessing he has promised.

Last updated on: October 9, 2024

Table of Contents

Module 1: A Deceiver Is Born

[Session 1: Jacob in the Biblical Imagination](#)

[Session 2: The Thematic Melody of Genesis 1-9](#)

[Session 3: Abraham Replays the Melody](#)

[Session 4: The Birth of Esau and Jacob](#)

[Session 5: Jacob Tricks Esau](#)

Module 2: Isaac's Story and Jacob's Deception

[Session 6: Isaac Deceives Abimelech](#)

[Session 7: Eden Springs in a Dry Land](#)

[Session 8: Reconciled Through Covenant](#)

[Session 9: Rebekah's Plan to Deceive Isaac](#)

[Session 10: Isaac Blesses Jacob](#)

[Session 11: Parting of the Brothers](#)

Module 3: Jacob's Exile

[Session 12: Jacob at the Gate of Heaven](#)

[Session 13: Deception in the House of Laban](#)

[Session 14: Laban Deceives Jacob](#)

[Session 15: God Sees Leah](#)

[Session 16: Rival Wives and Many Sons](#)

Module 4: Jacob's Flight From Laban

[Session 17: Jacob Deceives His Deceiver](#)

[Session 18: Jacob Versus the Narrator](#)

[Session 19: Laban Pursues Jacob](#)

[Session 20: Jacob and Laban Make a Covenant](#)

Module 5: Jacob's Return From Exile

[Session 21: Jacob Builds an Ark](#)

[Session 22: God Wrestles With Jacob](#)

[Session 23: The Reunion of Jacob and Esau](#)

[Session 24: The Oppression of Dinah](#)

[Session 25: Jacob's Silence](#)

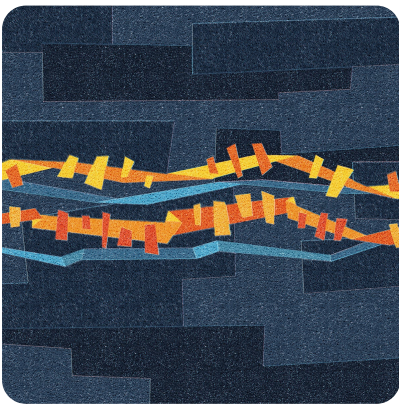
Module 6: Jacob's Return to the Land

[Session 26: Jacob Returns to Bethel](#)

[Session 27: The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac](#)

[Session 28: Jacob and Esau Part Ways](#)

[Session 29: Reflecting on the Jacob Story](#)



Module 1: A Deceiver Is Born

SESSIONS 1-5

From the moment of his birth, Jacob's character is shrouded in ambiguity and doubt. Discover how Jacob's story fits in God's plan to bless the world.

Session 1: Jacob in the Biblical Imagination

Key Takeaways

- The Bible mentions Yaaqov/Yisrael thousands of times, highlighting the importance of his story for the people who bear his name.
- Yaaqov’s story gives, in seed form, a preview of the story that his descendants will experience from Exodus through the end of the Hebrew Bible.
- The prophets and New Testament authors employ Yaaqov’s story as a lens to help understand their own story.

Yaaqov: The Patriarch of Israel

Yaaqov is one of the most important characters in the Genesis scroll. His story take up half the scroll, from his birth ([Gen. 25:20-26](#)) to his death ([Gen. 50](#)).

Abraham's story takes up 13 chapters in Genesis, and he is very important as the ancestor of the family of Israel. But Yaaqov's story takes up 25 chapters, and he is the father of the 12 sons who will become the 12 tribes of Israel. The rest of the Hebrew Bible tells the story of those tribes.

Yaaqov is mentioned more often than Abraham in both Genesis and the Hebrew Bible.

	Mentioned in Genesis	Mentioned in the Rest of the Torah (Exodus-Deuteronomy)	The Prophets	The Writings	TaNak as a Whole	New Testament
Abram	59x	0x	0x	2x		
Abraham	133x	18x	11x	13x		
	Total: 192x	Total: 18x	Total: 11x	Total: 15x	Total: 236x	Total: 73x
Jacob	180x	32x	98x	39x		

Yaaqov in Genesis and Hebrew Bible. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

	Mentioned in Genesis	Mentioned in the Rest of the Torah (Exodus- Deuteronomy)	The Prophets	The Writings	TaNaK as a Whole	New Testament
Israel	43x	544x	1,487x	432x		
	Total: 223x	Total: 576x	Total: 1,585x	Total: 471x	Total: 2,855x	Total: 27x
Yaaqov in Genesis and Hebrew Bible. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).						

Yaaqov's character in Genesis is foundational for the entire story of the Israelites told in Exodus-2 Kings and reflected upon in the Prophets and Writings. Every aspect of Israel's story influences the way their ancestor's story is told.

Yaaqov has two names in English: "Yaaqov" (Heb. *ya'aqov* = יעקב / Grk. *Ιακωβ*) which in Hebrew means "heel grabber, usurper"; and "Israel" (Heb. *yisra'el* = ישראל / Grk. *Ισραηλ*) which means "struggled with El."

Yaaqov's Story and Israel's Story

Yaaqov's story is filled with deception and trickery, exile and return, and it describes his struggle with Yahweh. All of this is remembered by later biblical authors as an explanation for Israel's corruption, but also as a source of hope for a future after exile.

Hosea 12:1-5 NASB

¹ Ephraim feeds on wind,
and pursues the east wind continually;
he multiplies lies and violence.
Moreover, he makes a covenant with Assyria,
and oil is carried to Egypt.

² The LORD also has a dispute with Judah,
and will punish Jacob according to his ways;
he will repay him according to his deeds.

**³ In the womb he took his brother by the heel,
and in his strength he contended with God.**

**⁴ Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed;
he wept and sought his favor.
He found him at Bethel
and there he spoke with us,**

⁵ even the LORD, the God of hosts,
the LORD is his name.

Hosea sees Israel's dependence on foreign powers as a replay of Yaaqov's deceit and lack of trust in Yahweh's promise back in Genesis. Yaaqov's trickster nature at birth continues into his lifelong struggle with God, and this is the same story being worked out in Hosea's own day.

Isaiah 29:22-23 NASB

²² Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob:

**"Jacob shall not now be ashamed,
nor shall his face now turn pale;**

²³ but when he sees his children,
the work of my hands, in his midst,
they will sanctify my name; indeed,
they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob
and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.

This passage from Isaiah recalls Yaaqov's exile as a lone figure trekking to Mesopotamia because that story ended with Yaaqov flourishing in exile with many children. Here Isaiah portrays Israel's future as a replay of this previous story so the now-exiled people of Israel can trust that Yahweh will once again bring abundance to his people in the midst of their suffering.

Isaiah 41:8-9 NASB

⁸ But you, Israel, my servant,
**Jacob whom I have chosen,
descendant of Abraham, my friend,**
**⁹ you whom I have taken from the ends of the earth,
and called from its remotest parts**
and said to you,
"You are my servant,
I have chosen you and not rejected you."

Here the story of Yaaqov's exile and return is recalled and turned into a model for the generation of Israel in exile, waiting for their return. The stories of Genesis have been shaped by the prophets with an eye toward the future.

Jeremiah 31:15-17 NASB

¹⁵ Thus says the LORD,
"A voice is heard in Ramah,
lamentation and bitter weeping.
**Rachel is weeping for her children;
she refuses to be comforted for her children,
because they are no more."**

¹⁶ Thus says the LORD,
"Restrain your voice from weeping

and your eyes from tears;
for your work will be rewarded,” declares the LORD,
"and they will return from the land of the enemy.
17 There is hope for your future,”
declares the LORD,
“and your children will return to their own territory.”

Here the story of Rakhel's death (from [Gen. 35](#)) is recalled and turned into an image of Israel's ancestors grieving over the nation's suffering, defeat, and exile at the hands of the Babylonians. But, just as Rakhel died while giving birth to Benjamin, so also the current generation in exile is undergoing a kind of death that will be followed by a return to the land. Remember that Benjamin's role in the story of Yaaqov's sons ([Gen. 43-45](#)) is pivotal to their entry into Egyptian exile and their eventual return into the promised land.

Ezekiel 28:25 NASB

Thus says the Lord God, “When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and will manifest my holiness in them in the sight of the nations, **then they will live in their land which I gave to my servant Jacob.”**

Just like Yaaqov returned from exile and was promised land, the generation of Babylonian exiles will be granted the same hope and promise.

Malachi 1:1-3 NASB

- ¹ The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi.
- ² “I have loved you,” says the LORD. But you say, “How have you loved us?” “Was not Esau Jacob's brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob;
- ³ but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.”

Here the story of God's selection of Yaaqov instead of Esau is turned into a paradigm for their respective descendants, so Edom's choices and fate will mirror the choices and fate of their ancestors.

Yaaqov in the New Testament

Yaaqov is mentioned in the genealogies of Jesus provided in [Matthew 1](#) and [Luke 3](#). This is part of showing Jesus' identity as an Israelite.

Yaaqov is also mentioned in ways that show how Jesus' story replays and fulfills Yaaqov's story.

- Jesus meets the Samaritan women at “Yaaqov's well,” mirroring the story of Yaaqov meeting Rakhel at a well ([John 4](#) and [Gen. 29](#)).
- Jesus was favored by his heavenly Father and rejected by his Israelite brothers, just as Joseph was favored by Yaaqov and rejected by his brothers ([Acts 7:8-15](#)).
- God's selection of the nations to participate in the victory of Israel's message, while many Israelites reject their own Messiah, was pre-figured by God's selection of the unworthy Israelites and not the

Edomites, which was itself prefigured by the story of God's selection of Yaaqov and not Esau (see Rom. 9:6-13, alluding to Mal. 1:2-4, alluding to Gen. 25-27).

The Takeaway

Yaaqov's story in Genesis 25:18-37:1 was not collected and written out of mere historical interest. Rather, every part of his story was designed to anticipate and prefigure the later history of his descendants, the nation called by his own name: Israel!

However, Yaaqov's story is not only designed to point forward. It was also designed to carry forward the themes and main ideas of the Genesis scroll so far.

- Genesis 1:1-2:3: God blesses humanity and promises blessing for all nations.
- Genesis 2:4-25: God turns a barren desert into a garden and places his image-bearing representatives in the good land, full of abundance and fertility.
- Genesis 3:1-24: God's representatives are deceived and fail by eating from the death-dealing tree, resulting in their exile.
- Genesis 4-5: God selects one brother for the lineage of blessing, creating hostility between the chosen and the non-chosen.
- Genesis 6-9: The hostility increases to a crisis point and is only brought to an end by a de-creation and re-creation event that results in a covenant and a new blessing.

Reflection Question

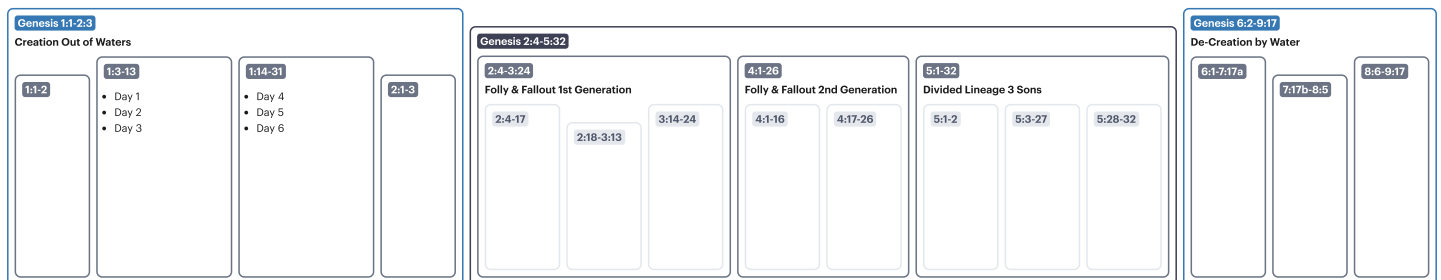
How do the prophets make use of Yaaqov's story (e.g., Hosea 12:1-5)?

Session 2: The Thematic Melody of Genesis 1-9

Key Takeaways

- Chapter and verse numbers are not part of the original structure of the biblical text. Rather, literary units of the text are indicated by vocabulary and thematic shifts.
- Genesis 1-9 introduces a thematic melody moving from blessing to deception, curse, division, exile, violence, and de-creation before resolving in the rescue of a remnant to begin the cycle anew.
- The Yaaqov story is set to the thematic melody of Genesis 1-9, replaying through it many times.

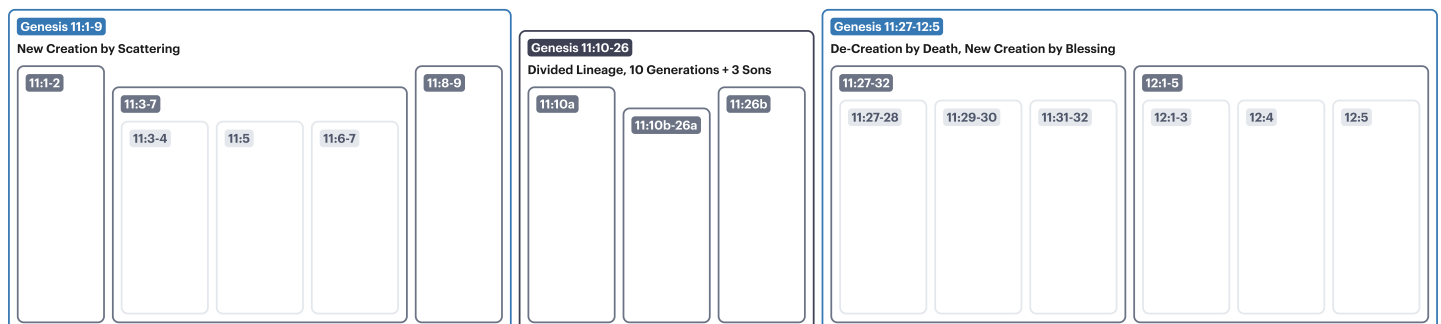
The Literary Design of Genesis 1-11



Genesis 1:1-9:17. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).



Genesis 6:1-11:9. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).



Genesis 11:1-12:5. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

These thematic cycles set up a thematic melody (a narrative pattern) that re-cycles with each generation, developing and advancing. The basic melody goes like this.

1. Creation and Blessing

- God bring order/life/blessing/ out of chaos/waters/death/curse
- Key words: life, blessing, create, establish, seed, sprout, grow, fruit, fruitful, and multiply; and seven, fullness, oath (all spelled שבע)
- Key images: dry land, refuge, safety, order

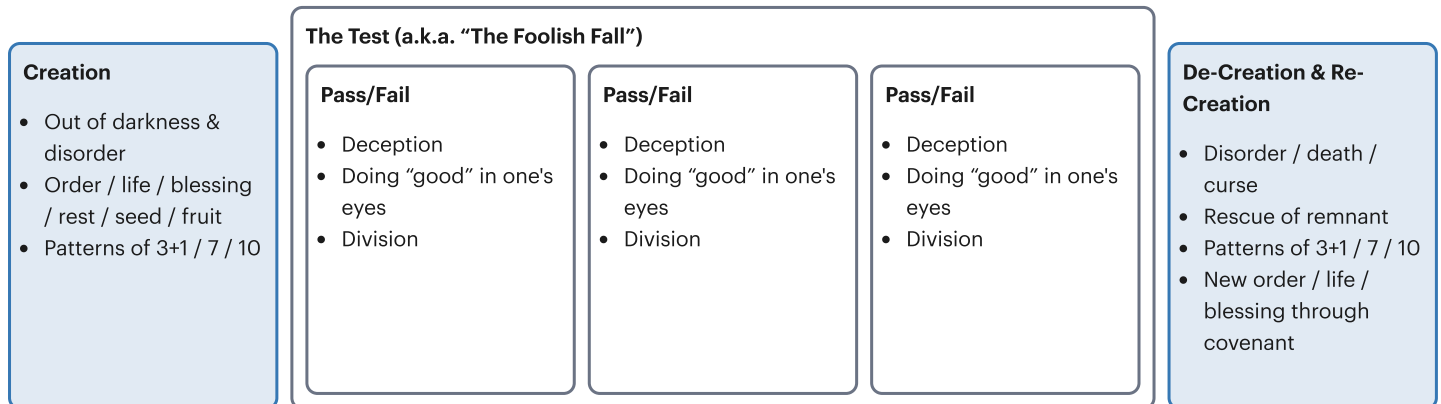
2. Folly, Test, and Failure (a.k.a. The Foolish Fall)

- God invites a chosen human partner to share in the order/life/bless, which places a decision/test of their trustworthiness on the table.
- God's chosen partner fails/succeeds the test, usually involving deception/division/violence.
- The same person/next generation faces their own opportunity and test, and fails/succeeds, usually involving an intensified expression of deception/division/violence.
- The escalating sequence of tests and failures leads to a separation between the key characters so that one person or family splits off from the rest and is chosen by God for a new future.
- Key words found in Genesis 2-3, 4-5, 6:1-4.

3. De-creation and Re-creation

- De-creation: God brings about an inversion of number one above, usually an escalation of chaos/death/curse.
- Out of that de-creation, God chooses/preserves a remnant/seed and begins a new movement of re-creation through them (often marked by covenants and wordplays on the Hebrew root שבע, "seven/fullness/oath" or "covenant," ברית).
- Key words found in Genesis 6:5-9:17

4. Repeat steps 1-3.

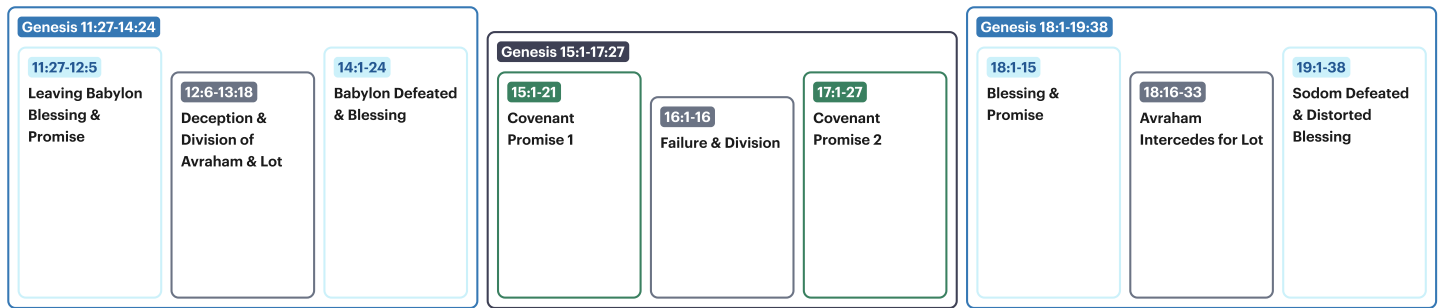


Genesis 1:1-11:26. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

The Abraham stories are organized according to this same thematic melody, as the cycle replays itself on the macro-level, medium-level, and micro-level of each part of the story.

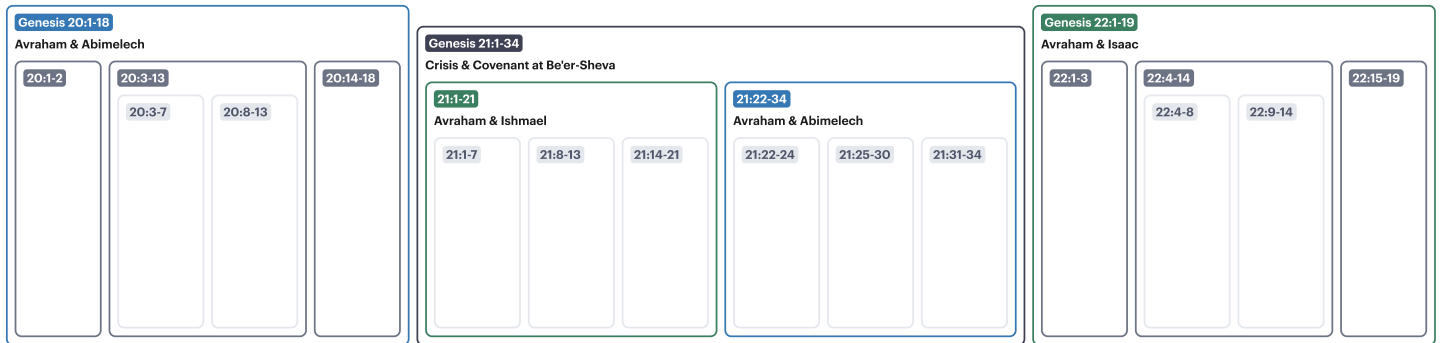
The Literary Design of the Abraham Story

Part 1: Genesis 11:27-19:38



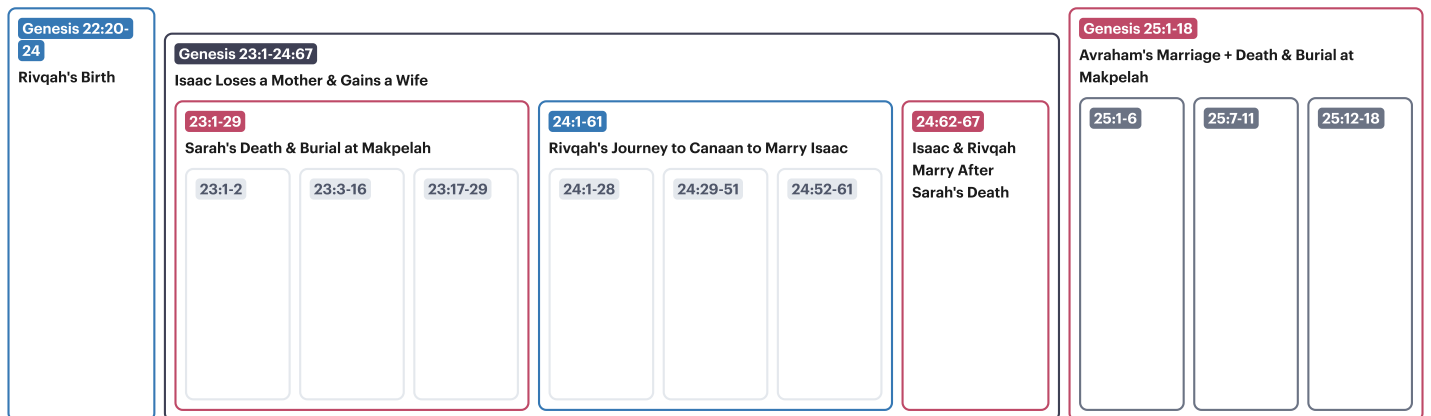
Genesis 11:27-19:38. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Part 2: Genesis 20:1-22:19



Genesis 20:1-22:19. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Part 3: Genesis 22:20-25:18



Genesis 22:20-25:18. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Reflection Question

Are there any elements of the thematic melody of Genesis 1-9 you see connecting to the Yaaqov story already?

Session 3: Abraham Replays the Melody

Key Takeaways

- The thematic melody of Genesis is a lens through which we can examine our own lives.
- God's plan for all creation is worked out in the lives and relationships of generation after generation of God's chosen human partners.
- The thematic melody of the Bible, repeated throughout Abraham's life, prepares us to understand Yaaqov's story.



This session covers the notes from session 2

Reflection Question

How can tracing the thematic melody of the Bible in Abraham's life help us prepare to read Yaaqov's story?

Session 4: The Birth of Esau and Jacob

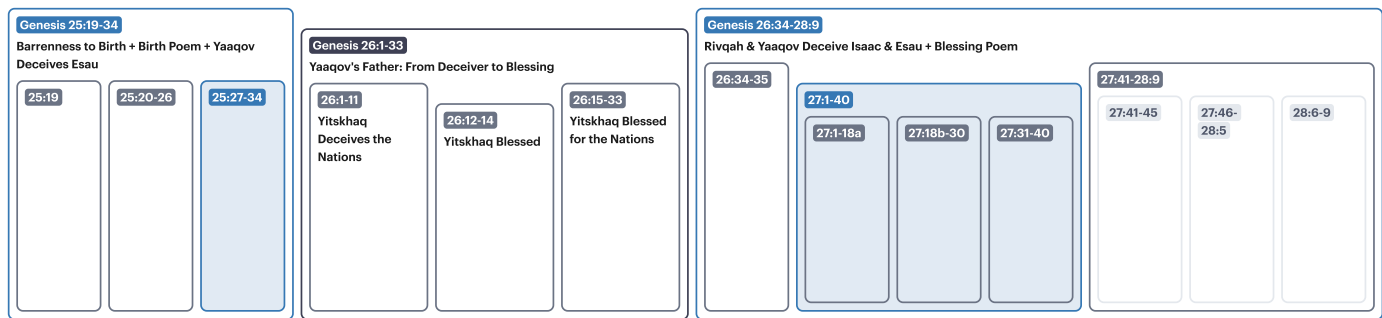
Key Takeaways

- The Yaaqov story offers a raw look at human nature, with deception central to each of its three movements.
- Yaaqov’s story is a tragedy marked by his repeated scheming attempts to secure blessing for himself instead of trusting God and extending blessing to those around him.
- God’s words mark Yaaqov as the one chosen to carry forth the promise of blessing, but from the moment of his birth, Yaaqov’s character is shrouded in ambiguity and doubt.

The Literary Design of the Yaaqov Story

Part 1: Genesis 25:19-28:9

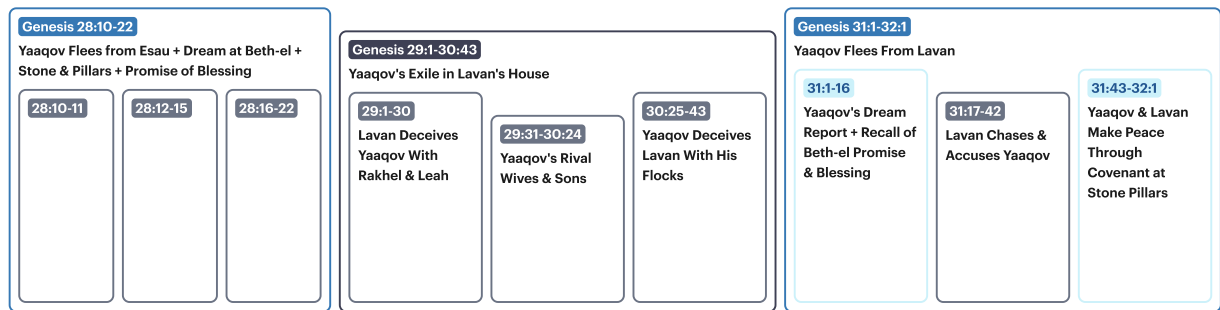
Yaaqov’s deception, sibling rivalry and division, and Yaaqov’s exile.



Genesis 25:19-28:9. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Part 2: Genesis 28:10-32:1

Yaaqov in exile: deception, sibling rivalry and division, and Yaaqov's flight.



Genesis 28:10-32:1. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

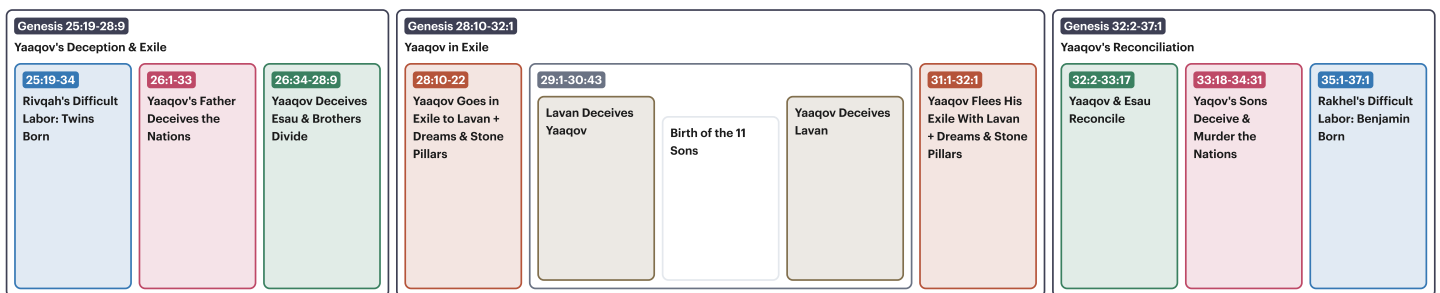
Part 3: Genesis 32:1-37:1

Yaaqov returns from exile, reconciles with Esau, sons' deception and violence.



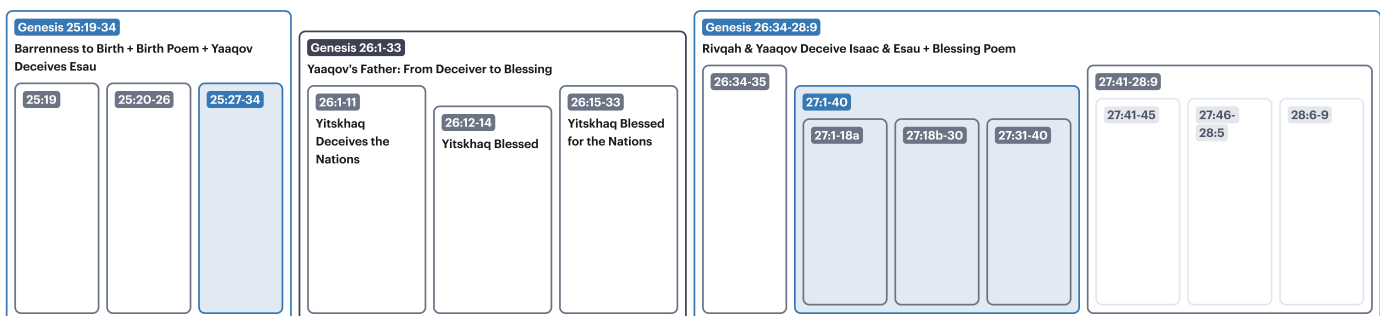
Genesis 32:1-37:1. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Once we see how the Yaaqov story is organized into three larger bundles, the overall design shape also shows an inverse symmetrical strategy.



Genesis 25:19-37:1. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

A Deceiver Born and Exiled



Genesis 25:19-28:9. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

This opening part of the Yaaqov story is made up of three larger literary units with a symmetrical design. The opening section recounts the boys' birth and their first rivalry (Gen. 25:19-34), and these events anticipate the even greater deception and rivalry that explodes in the final section (Gen. 27:34-28:9). In the center we find the story of Yitskhaq, which is itself a three-part symmetrical unit, where Yitskhaq's deception mirrors the deception of his son in the outer units.

Genesis 25:19-34

- Yaaqov (יעקב) is named because he grabs Esau's "heel" (עקב)
- Esau is born hairy and hunts animals

- Yaaqov tricks Esau out of his firstborn right (בכרה)
- “Two nations are in your womb, the greater will serve the littler”

Genesis 26:1-33

- **26:1-11** Yitskhaq deceives Avimelek regarding Sarah
- **26:12-14** Yahweh blesses Yitskhaq in the land
- **26:15-33** Avimelek makes a covenant of peace with Yitskhaq to be included in the blessing

Genesis 26:34-28:9

- Rivqah and Yaaqov trick Yitskhaq to get Esau’s blessing (ברכה)
- Yaaqov is disguised in animal hair to imitate Esau
- “Isn’t he rightly named ‘Yaaqov’?! He’s deceived me two times, taking my firstborn right (בכרה) and my blessing (ברכה)!”
- “May the peoples become your servant ... and your mother's sons bow down to you.”

Genesis 25:19-28:9. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

The Birth and Rivalry of the Brothers

¹⁹ And these are the **birth** -generations (תולדות) of **Yitskhaq**,
son of Avraham:
Avraham
 caused the **birth** (הוליד) of **Yitskhaq**

²⁰ **and Yitskhaq was a son of forty years**
 a when he took Rivqah,
 b the daughter of **Bethuel the Aramean**
 c of Paddan-aram,
 b' the sister of **Lavan the Aramean**,
 a' to be his wife.
 a ²¹ And **Yitskhaq petitioned Yahweh** on behalf of his wife,
 b because **she was barren** ;
 a' and **Yahweh was petitioned by him**
 b' and **Rivqah his wife conceived** .

²² And they struck one another, the sons within her,
and she said, “If it is this way, what is this ... me? (למה זה)”
 and **she went to inquire of Yahweh** .

²³ **And Yahweh said** to her,

- a "Two nations are in your womb;
 a' and two peoples (לאם) will be separated from your guts;
 b and a people (לאם) will be stronger than a people (לאם);
 b' and the great one shall serve the little one."

24 And when her days were fulfilled (מלא) to give birth (ללדת),
 behold, there were twins (תומם) in her womb.

- a 25 And the first (ראשון) came out red,
 b all over like a garment of hair (שער);
 c and they called his name: Esau (עשו).
 a 26 And afterward (אחרי כן) there came out his brother
 b and his hand was grabbing the heel (עקב) of Esau,
 c and he called his name Yaaqov (יעקב);

and Yitskhaq was a son of sixty years
 when she gave birth (בלדת) to them.

Genesis 25:19-26. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Jacob (2021).

The Birth Generations of Yitskhaq

This notice in Genesis 25:19 is a macro-structural device in the Genesis scroll. The phrase appears 10x in the scroll, and it signals that the story is progressing to the next generation of God's chosen family, the line selected for blessing.

The following chart shows the progression.

God Blesses the Chosen One, Who Eventually Fails or Just Dies	God Chooses One From the Next Generation of Brothers Who Then Separate, Usually to the East	Toledot Notice	Genealogy of the Non-Chosen & the Chosen	Selection and Blessing of the Next Generation
Humanity	Gen. 1:26-28 God chooses humans, not animals	Gen. 2:4 "These are the birth generations of the skies and the land ..."		Gen. 1:26-28 Humans blessed

The Birth Generations of Yitskhaq. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

God Blesses the Chosen One, Who Eventually Fails or Just Dies	God Chooses One From the Next Generation of Brothers Who Then Separate, Usually to the East	Toledot Notice	Genealogy of the Non-Chosen & the Chosen	Selection and Blessing of the Next Generation
Gen. 2-3 Adam & Eve	Gen. 4 God chooses Hevel, then Seth, not Cain	Gen. 5:1 "This is the scroll of the birth generations of 'adam ..."	Gen. 4:17-18 Cain's line Gen. 5:1-32 Seth's line	Gen. 9:1 Noah's blessing
Gen. 6-9 Noah & wife	Gen. 6:8-9 God chooses Noah and his family, not the generation of the flood	Gen. 6:9 "These are the birth generations of Noah ..."		Gen. 9:26 Shem's blessing
Gen. 9:1-17 Shem	Gen. 9:18-29 God chooses Shem, not Yapheth or Ham	Gen. 10:1 "These are the birth generations of the sons of Noah, Shem ..."	Gen. 10 Noah's sons	Gen. 11:27-32 Terakh
Gen. 11:27-32 Terakh	Gen. 12:1-6 God chooses Avram, not Nahor or Haran	Gen. 11:27 "These are the birth generations of Terakh ..."	Gen. 11:10-26 Shem's line	Gen. 12:1-6 Avram
Gen. 11-24 Avraham & Sarah	Gen. 25:1-18 God chooses Yitskhaq, not Yishmael or the sons of Qeturah	Gen. 25:12 "These are the birth generations of Yishmael"	Gen. 25:12-18 Yishmael's line	Gen. 25:5-11 Yitskhaq
<i>The Birth Generations of Yitskhaq. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).</i>				

This narrative momentum prepares the reader to expect that Yitskhaq's story will also replay this cycle. We expect the birth of siblings, one of whom will be chosen and the other not, and we expect this will separate the family instead of uniting them.

Remember, all of this momentum is generated out of the promise of Genesis 3:15, which says there will come from the lineage of Eve a future seed who will encounter hostility from the snake and the snake's seed. However, Eve's seed will fatally wound the snake and be wounded by the snake.

Genesis 3:15 Instructor's Translation

And I will set hostility
between **you** and **the woman** ,
and between **your seed** and **her seed** ;
he will **strike** your head
and **you** will **strike** his heel.

Like Father Abraham, Like Son Yaaqov

Yitskhaq's story takes up the early part of Yaaqov's story. He features as a character in only chapters 25-28 and then is absent from the narrative. He is a transition figure in the Genesis scroll, which focuses mainly on Abraham and Yaaqov.

However, Yitskhaq is a key link in the narrative argument about this family whom God has chosen as his vehicle to restore the Eden blessing to the nations. Yitskhaq's story will replay many of the core themes from his father's story, while anticipating many of the themes from Yaaqov's story to come.

Links Back to the Avraham Narratives	Genesis 25:19-34	Links Forward to Yaaqov Narratives
Gen. 25:12 "These are the generations of Ishmael ..."	Gen. 25:19a "These are the generations of Yitskhaq, son of Avraham ..."	Gen. 37:1 "These are the generations of Yaaqov ..."
Gen. 24:1-67 Avraham's servant meets Rivqah and Lavan and asks that she can marry Yitskhaq	Gen. 25:20 Yitskhaq was 40 when he took Rivqah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan-aram, sister of Lavan the Aramean as a wife	Gen. 29:31 Yaaqov will go to Paddan-aram to work for Lavan in order to marry the daughters of Lavan
Gen. 11:30 Sarai was barren (עקרה)	Gen. 25:21 Rivqah is barren (עקרה)	Gen. 29:31 Rakhel will be barren (עקרה)
Gen. 16-17 Sibling conflict between parents before birth (Hagar & Sarah)	Gen. 25:22, 26 Sibling conflict between the children during birth	Gen. 27, 32-33 Two sons will live in conflict after their birth
Gen. 16, 21 Avraham's two rival wives birth two rival nations :	Gen. 25:23 "two nations are in your womb" = Yitskhaq's two	Gen. 29-30 Yaaqov's two rival wives (whose favor with
<i>Like Father Avraham, Like Son Yaaqov.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).		

Links Back to the Avraham Narratives	Genesis 25:19-34	Links Forward to Yaaqov Narratives
Israel and the Ishmaelites, which upsets the order of firstborn	rival sons birth two rival nations that upset the order of firstborn	Yaaqov upsets the order of the firstborn) birth rival tribes : Judah and Joseph, which upsets the order of firstborn
Gen. 16, 21 Avraham's older son Ishmael will serve the younger Yitskhaq	Gen. 25:23 "the older will serve the younger"	Gen. 29-30 Yaaqov will eventually overcome Esau but only after his own term of "service" to the elder Lavan
	Gen. 25:27-28 Esau is a hunter in the field, while Yaaqov is a man of the tents	Gen. 29-31 Yaaqov will spend his 20 years serving Lavan "in the field"
Gen. 21-22 Hagar loves Ishmael, Sarah loves Yitskhaq, and Avraham loves them both	Gen. 25:27-28 "... Yitskhaq loved firstborn Esau ... but Rivqah loved second born Yaaqov"	Gen. 29:30-31 "Yaaqov loved Rakhel [second born] more than Leah [firstborn]"
<i>Like Father Avraham, Like Son Yaaqov. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).</i>		

"These parallels are sufficiently close to suggest that they are not coincidental. The history of Isaac's family is being deliberately compared with that of Abraham. And if this is so, special attention needs to be paid to the divine oracle summarizing the future career of Esau and Jacob in 25:23, for this occupies a position analogous to the promises made to Abraham in 12:1-3. The latter passage is of cardinal importance not just for the Abraham cycle but for the whole Pentateuch whose theme it states. Here 25:23 is similarly programmatic: it announces the God-determined career of Jacob to be one of conflict culminating in ultimate triumph."

Wenham, Gordon J. (1994). [Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 2: Genesis 16–50](#). Word. 173.

From Barrenness to Birth

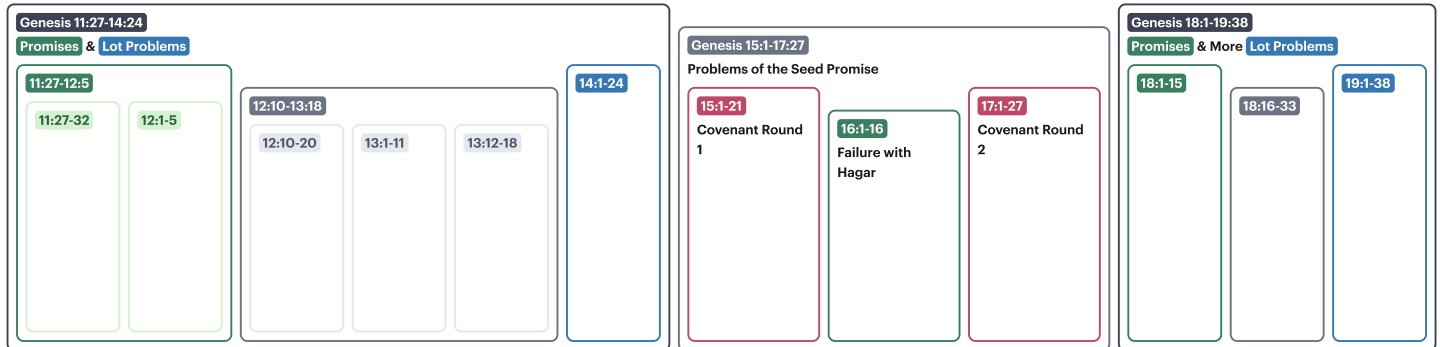
Genesis 25:21 Instructor's Translation

And **Yitskhaq petitioned Yahweh** on behalf of his wife, because she was **barren**; and **Yahweh was petitioned by him** and Rivqah his wife **conceived**.

This story recalls the crisis that Yitskhaq's parents faced at the beginning of their story. Sarah's inability to have children stood in tension with God's promise to bless their family and make them into a great nation. Now God's blessing on Yitskhaq (Gen. 25:11) stands in tension with Yitskhaq and Rivqah's inability to produce children.

However, in contrast to Abraham and Sarah, Yitskhaq and Rivqah quickly find a solution to this crisis: they turn to Yahweh in prayer. However, even this redemptive breaking of the generational chain does not prevent their children from replaying the separation of their ancestors.

The Yitskhaq and Yaaqov story opens with a crisis of fertility on purpose. It goes back to a key theme in the opening movement of the Abraham story.



Genesis 11:27-19:38. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Genesis 11:30 Instructor's Translation

Sarai was barren; she had **no child (יֶלֶד)**.

Genesis 16:1 Instructor's Translation

Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him **no child (יֶלֶד)**, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar.

Genesis 18:10-12 Instructor's Translation

¹⁰ And he said,
 "I will surely return to you at the time of life
 and look, **Sarah your wife will have a son**!"
 Now, Sarah was hearing this at the door of the tent,
 and it was behind him.
¹¹ Now, Abraham and Sarah were old,
 going on in years.
 There had stopped for Sarah the way of women,
¹² and Sarah laughed within herself, saying,
 "After I have become worn out,
will I have Eden (= "delight"),
 and my master, being old?"

Yitskhaq and Rivqah's story has the same theme and vocabulary as Abraham and Sarah's story. This is obviously intentional. And the similarities go even further back. The Eden story begins with the same crisis, but in this case, it features a dry and barren desert unable to produce any plants or seed.

And no bush of the field was yet in the land
and no plant of the field yet sprouted (צמח)

No Water

for Yahweh Elohim had not caused rain upon the land

Human + Ground

and human there was not for working the ground

Water + From the Ground

but a spring would go up from the ground
and it would water all the face of the ground

Human + From the Ground

and Yahweh Elohim formed the human as dust from the ground
and he blew in his nostrils the breath of life
and the human became a living being

Plants + Sprout + From the Ground

and Yahweh Elohim planted a garden in Eden, facing east
and he placed there the human whom he formed
and Yahweh Elohim caused to sprout (צמח) from the ground
every tree, desirable for seeing and good for eating
and the tree of life was in the middle of the garden
and the tree of knowing good and bad

Genesis 2:4-9. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021)

This narrative also begins with infertility, focusing on the land's inability to produce plants without water. Notice the reversal from barren desert to garden signaled by the words "sprout" and "Eden." This sets up a narrative pattern that carries our expectations into the Yitskhaq story.

Eden Story (Genesis 2-3)	Sarah's Story (Genesis 12-21)	Rivqah's Story (Genesis 25-28)
Begins with barren desert	Begins with "barrenness" — 'aqar ah (ה עקר) = "without root"	Begins with "barrenness" — 'aqar ah (ה עקר) = "without root"
God provides water and infuses the dust with divine breath	God "visits" (פקד) Sarah	God is "petitioned" — 'atar (עתר) — by Yitskhaq
Result: Eden ! Trees, sprouting, and life!	Result: Pregnancy = Eden ! (see Gen. 18:12) A son !	Result: Pregnancy and two sons !
From Barrenness to Life. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).		

Two Brothers in the Womb

The birth oracle in Genesis 25:23 is cryptic and full of ambiguities that link back to earlier narratives of sibling rivalry, but it also points forward to the Yaaqov story.

Genesis 25:23 Instructor's Translation

Two nations are in your womb;
and two peoples (לָאָם) will be separated from your guts;
and a people (לָאָם) will be stronger than a people (לָאָם);
and the great one shall serve the little one.

The oracle (Gen. 25:22-23) Rivqah receives about the nations "crushing one another" in her womb is cryptic and has been crafted with an eye toward multiple other poems in Genesis as well as the larger themes at work in Genesis 1-24 and 25-50.

Genesis 1-24	The Birth Oracle in Genesis 25:23	Genesis 26-50
Two sons represent two nations • Cain = City of Cain vs. Seth = Sethites • Japeth, Shem, Ham all = nations • Avraham = Hebrews // Lot = Ammonites, Moabites • Ishmael = Midianites // Yitskhaq =	Two nations are in your womb,	Sons represent tribes • 12 sons of Yaaqov = 12 tribes of Israel • Esau = Tribes of Edom
Two Brothers in the Womb. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).		

Genesis 1-24	The Birth Oracle in Genesis 25:23	Genesis 26-50
Hebrews • Esau = Edom // Yaaqov = Israel		
Two brothers who represent people groups will separate (פָּרַד) outside of Eden. • The River from the garden separates outside Eden • Cain and Abel/Seth separate outside of Eden • Japeth, Shem, Ham separate outside the ark • Avraham and Lot separate outside the hill country • Ishmael and Yitskhaq separate outside Avraham's tent • Esau and Yaaqov separate outside Rivqah's womb	and two people groups from your loins will be separated	Brothers separate outside of "Eden" Gen. 36 Israel and Edom will settle in opposite regions
One brother/people serves their brother/people Gen. 9:25-27 Cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants to his brothers. Blessed be Yahweh, God of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japeth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant.	and a people will be stronger than a people and a greater will serve a smaller	One brother/people serves their brother/people • Gen. 29-31 Israel serves Lavan the Aramean • Gen. 37-42 Joseph's dream that his brothers will bow down and serve him • Gen. 49 Yaaqov's blessing on Judah: Your brothers will bow down to you • Exod. 1-15 Egypt (son of Ham) enslaves Israel (son of Shem)
<i>Two Brothers in the Womb.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).		

Let's look at the phrase "nations will be separated from your loins." This image connects to the entire web of Eden blessing themes, such as the divine river that left the garden and separated outside to water the nations (פָּרַד, Gen. 2:10). This river is set on analogy to the womb of all the matriarchs whose sons "separate" (פָּרַד) outside the womb and end up in conflict with each other.

Look at the riddle of the final line: *The greater one / he will serve / the younger one.*

Hebrew word order allows for the subject to come before or after the verb, as well as the object. This means the final line could be read in two opposite ways, and both seem intended.

- Option 1: The greater one will serve the younger one.
- Option 2: The greater one, the younger one will serve.

This ambiguity allows for the changing power dynamics in the brothers' relationship throughout the narrative. Yaaqov will deceive and usurp Esau's role as the firstborn, but then Esau's anger and power will force Yaaqov into exile, where he must serve Lavan for twenty years and then come back to present himself to Esau as "your servant" ([Gen. 33:5](#)). While Yaaqov does prevail over Esau in the end, it is only by becoming a slave himself as a consequence of his sins against his brother (see Yair Zakovitch, [Jacob](#), p. 16-17).

This ambiguity also previews the future relations between the nations of Israel and Edom, especially in 1-2 Kings (note that each son is called "a nation" in the womb).

Yaaqov: Born a Heel-Grabber

Genesis 25:26 Instructor's Translation

And afterward there came out his brother
and his hand was grabbing the **heel (עקב)** of Esau,
and he called his name **Yaaqov (יעקב)** ;

Yaaqov is born grabbing the heel of his brother, which is a potent image that symbolizes all that is to come in his story. The use of the rare word 'aqev in Genesis opens up a whole series of reflections.

English	Hebrew	Usage in Genesis
heel	‘aqev (עקב)	Gen. 3:15 The snake will strike the heel of the seed (זרע) of the woman. Gen. 25:26 Yaaqov is born grabbing he heel of his brother. Gen. 49:17 Dan will be like a snake on the road, that bites the heel of a horse, causing the rider to fall.
to grab the heel, usurp, trick	‘aqav (עקב)	Gen. 27:36 Isn't he named Yaaqov ? And so he " yaaqov'd "
Yaaqov	yaaqov (יעקב)	
Yaaqov the Heel Grabber. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).		

English	Hebrew	Usage in Genesis
on account of, because of, lit. “on the heel of”	‘eqev (עקב)	Gen. 22:17-18 “All the nations of the land will discover blessing by means of your seed (זרעך), because of/on account of (עקב) your listening to my voice.” Gen. 26:4-5 “All the nations of the land will discover blessing by means of your seed (זרעך), because of/on account of (עקב) his listening to my voice, and he kept my warning, my commands, my statutes, and my instruction (<i>torah</i>).”
<i>Yaaqov the Heel Grabber</i>. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).		

There are multiple contrasts at work here.

1. The snake versus the seed of the woman: The Eden story sets up the expectation that people will take up the role of the snake and become hostile toward the one God chooses to bless. The next story, about Cain, Abel, and Seth, dramatizes this tension. The non-chosen brother gives in to the power of the snake (= “sin” in Gen. 4:7), and becomes hostile to the chosen brother. At first, we may think this will be a story with binary character sets: chosen versus non-chosen, good guys versus bad guys.
2. Abraham acts like a snake: In two stories that both replay the story of Adam and Eve’s failure in Eden, Abraham takes on the role of the snake and brings curse on the nations instead of a blessing (see Gen. 12:10-20, 20:1-14).

Avram’s Deception in Genesis 12:10-20	The Snake’s Deception in Genesis 3
Avram relies on his knowledge of what will happen in Egypt instead of trusting God’s promise Gen. 12:11-12 “I know (ידע) that a woman (אשה) beautiful of sight (מראה) you are ... and they will see you (ראה) ... and kill me and let you live (חיה).”	Adam and Eve seek their own knowledge of good and bad, instead of trusting God’s command Gen. 3:6 The woman (אשה) Eve (חווה) “saw (ראה)” the tree of knowing (ידע) good (טוב) and evil, “and it was desirable to the eyes.”
Avram’s deception results in “good” at the expense of Sarai, resulting in plagues on Pharaoh Gen. 12:13 “Say you’re my sister, so that it may be good (טוב), on account of you (בעבורך), and I will live (חיה).”	Adam and Eve’s actions result in curse on the ground Gen. 3:17 “Cursed is the ground on account of you (בעבורך).”
<i>Avraham and Snake’s Deception</i>. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

Avram's Deception in Genesis 12:10-20	The Snake's Deception in Genesis 3
Gen. 12:17 "And Yahweh sent plagues upon Pharaoh, on account of Sarai." Avram presents his wife as a "tree of testing" to the Egyptians Gen. 12:14-15 "And the Egyptians saw (ראה) the woman (האשה), that she was beautiful, very ... and she was taken (לקח) to the house of Pharaoh." Gen. 12:17 Yahweh struck/touched (נגע) Pharaoh with great strikes (נגעים).	The snake presents the "tree of testing" to the humans Gen. 3:6 "And the woman (האשה) saw (ראה) that good (טוב) was the tree for eating, and desirable to the eyes ... and she took (לקח)" Gen. 3:3 "... from the tree that is in the middle of the garden we cannot eat from it or touch it (נגע) ."
Pharaoh holds Avram accountable for his deception Gen. 12:18 "And Pharaoh called out to (ויקרא) Abram and said ' What is this you have done (מה זאת עשית) to me? You didn't tell (נגד) me that she was your wife."	God holds Adam and Eve accountable for their action Gen. 3:9 "And Yahweh called out to (ויקרא) the man ..." Gen. 3:13 "And Yahweh said to the woman, ' What is this you have done (מה זאת עשית)?'" Gen. 3:11 "Who told (נגד) you that you were naked?"
Pharaoh exiles Avram Gen. 12:20 "And Pharaoh commanded (ויצו) ... and sent him away (שלח)."	God exiles Adam and Eve Gen. 2:16 "And Yahweh commanded (ויצו) the human ..." Gen. 3:23 "And Yahweh sent away (שלח) the human from the garden of Eden."
<i>Avraham and Snake's Deception. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).</i>	

However, Abraham's story has a redemptive arc. A man who once acted like a snake eventually comes to trust God so radically that he will offer up the life of his son in faith that he will receive him back!

The use of the word 'eqev in Gen. 22:18 (along with many other echoes of the Eden failure story) shows that this is Abraham's victory over the snake! This is precisely the meaning of 'eqev that is recalled in the Yitskhaq and Yaaqov story in Gen. 26:4-5.

But the birth of Yaaqov throws a wrench into this mix. What happens when the seed of the woman is born a snake, grabbing the heel?

Reflection Question

Yaaqov's story is marked by schemes and deception. What can we learn about the interplay between God's sovereign purposes and the human partners he's chosen to work through?

Session 5: Jacob Tricks Esau

Key Takeaways

- The Hebrew word *tam* means whole or complete and is used to describe people of moral integrity.
- Describing Yaaqov as a “smooth man” has a double meaning: This contrasts his appearance with that of his brother, but it also links his deceitful actions with a developing theme of tricksters and deceivers in the Bible.
- Yaaqov’s deception of Esau (Edom) replays the snake’s deception of Adam in the garden of Eden.

Yaaqov Tricks Esau the Firstborn

27 And the boys grew up,
and **Esau** was a man having knowledge of **hunted-game (ציד)**
a man of **the field**,
and **Yaaqov** was a man of wholeness (תם),
a dweller of tents.

28 And Yitskhaq **loved Esau**,
because **hunted-game (ציד)** was in his mouth,
and Rivqah **loved Yaaqov**.

29 And Yaaqov **stewed a stew (נייד)**,
and Esau came in from **the field**,
and **he was faint**;
30 **and Esau said** to Yaaqov,
“Please let me swallow that **red red**, for **I am faint**.”
Therefore his name was called **Edom / red (אדום)**

31 **And he said**,
“**Today**, **sell me your firstborn-right (בכרה)**.”
32 **And Esau said**,
“Look, I am going to die;
what is this (למה זה) to me, a **firstborn-right (בכרה)**?”
33 **And Yaaqov said**,
“**Today**, **swear an oath to me**,”
and **so he swore an oath to him**,
and **he sold his firstborn-right (בכרה)** to Yaaqov.
34 And Yaaqov gave to Esau bread and **stew (נייד)** of lentil beans;

and he ate and he drank
and he rose and he left,
and Esau despised his **firstborn-right** (בכרה).

Genesis 25:27-34. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Esau the Animal Slayer

Esau is introduced as a hunter (ציד ידע), a unique description that recalls an earlier generation of the non-chosen son: Ham, whose grandson was Nimrod, the founder of Babylon and Assyria.

Gen. 10:6 The sons of Ham; Cush ...

⁸ Now, Cush became the father of **Nimrod** ;
he began to be a **mighty warrior** in the land.

⁹ He was a **mighty warrior-hunter** (גבור ציד)
before Yahweh;
therefore it is said,
“Like Nimrod a mighty warrior-hunter
before Yahweh.”

¹⁰ And the beginning of his kingdom was **Babylon** and Erech and
Accad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

¹¹ From that land he went forth into **Assyria, and built Nineveh** ...

Gen. 25:27 Esau had **knowledge of hunting game** (ידע ציד)

Gen. 25:30 Therefore his name is
called Edom

Esau/Edom becomes the father of
the **Edomites**

Esau the Animal Slayer. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Let's compare Esau with Ham and Nimrod.

- Ham and Esau are both the non-chosen sons.
- Esau and Nimrod are both animal slayers, a sign of being outside of Eden and at odds with the animals (see Gen. 9:1-5).
- Esau and Nimrod are both the founding figures of nations that will later become hostile to the family of Abraham: Babylon, Assyria, and Edom.
- Nimrod was a “violent warrior” (Heb. *gibbor* / גבור), a term used elsewhere of the Nephilim, the violent mutant offspring from the sons of *elohim* debacle in Gen. 6:1-4. While Esau himself is never called a *gibbor*, he definitely acts like one! This sets up an analogy:
 - Nephilim/*gibborim* of the generation of the flood
 - Nimrod/*gibbor* of the generation of Babylon
 - Esau/*gibbor*-like of the generation of Yaaqov
 - Both the Nephilim and Nimrod are carried away in a flood of God’s judgment in the forms of cosmic-flood (Gen. 6-8) and the scattering of an empire (Gen. 11). This leads us to assume that Esau will also be associated with some coming form of divine judgment.

Yaaqov the “Whole Man”

Genesis 25:27 Instructor’s Translation

and **Esau**
was **a man knowing hunted-game (ציד)**
a man of the field,
and **Yaaqov**
was **a man of wholeness (תם),**
a dweller of tents

Notice the parallel contrast set up between Esau and Yaaqov. On one level, it seems like a simple contrast: Esau is an outdoorsman among the animals, while Yaaqov is more of a homebody.

The description of Yaaqov as “whole” is curious. When the word is used of people, it usually means “morally blameless, whole in moral character.”

Job 1:1 NASB

There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless (**תם האיש**), upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.

Psalms 37:37 NIV

Consider the blameless (**תם**), observe the upright; a future awaits those who seek peace.

Proverbs 29:10 NIV

The bloodthirsty hate the blameless (**תם**) and seek to kill the upright.

The above passages are clear that to be “whole” is to be a morally upright person. But this word describes Yaaqov in a story about how he cheats his brother!

This word is used in a purposefully ironic way to establish Yaaqov as an anti-Noah who doesn't trust God, but it also matches a description of Yaaqov in the next deception story in Genesis 27:11.

Genesis 6:9 NASB

Noah was a righteous man morally-whole (**תמים**) among his generation.

Genesis 25:27 NASB

Esau is a “man knowing hunted-game, **a man of the field (שדה איש) ...**”
Yaaqov is a **“man of wholeness (תם איש),** a dweller in the tents”

Genesis 27:11 NASB

Look Esau my brother is **a man of hair (איש שער)**
but I am **a man of smoothness (איש חלק)**.

These matching statements illuminate each other.

- Esau’s “outdoorsman” nature matches his “hairy” body
- Yaaqov's “wholeness” matches his “smooth” body

Not only that, but “smoothness” (**חלק**) is a word often used to describe smooth-talkers and deceptive people.

Psalm 12:2-3 NIV

² Everyone lies to their neighbor; they have **smooth lips** but harbor deception in their hearts.
³ May the LORD silence all **smooth lips** and every boastful tongue—

Proverbs 5:3 NIV

For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey, and her speech is **smoother** than oil;

Proverbs 26:28 NIV

A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a **mouth of smoothness** works ruin.

Conclusion: Yaaqov's “wholeness” is a deliberately ironic way to describe his smooth skin and his deceptive nature. It also marks him as anti-chosen, unlike Noah who actually was “morally whole” and marked for deliverance from the flood.

Stealing the Firstborn-Right

In this famous story, Yaaqov deceives his hungry, bumbling oaf of a brother. The story contains many vivid images that set up the tensions that will drive the rest of the Yaaqov story.

Plot Conflict Introduced	Plot Conflict Intensified	Plot Conflict Resolved
Gen. 25 Yaaqov deceives his brother Esau of his firstborn-right (<i>bekorah</i>).	Gen. 27 Yaaqov deceives his father and brother of the firstborn's blessing (<i>berakah</i>).	Not resolved until Genesis 33 and 37.
Yaaqov deceptively cheats to gain what God said was already his: the position of firstborn .	Yaaqov deceptively cheats to gain what God said would be his: the blessing .	Not resolved until Genesis 35.
<i>Stealing the Firstborn-Right</i> . Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).		

The plot conflicts that begin in this story will generate the tension that spans the entire story of Yaaqov. This story introduces us to the big question at the heart of the Yaaqov story.

What if God's chosen one is so focused on self-gain and self-preservation that they constantly manipulate others to get what God already promised to give them and others through them?

In many ways, this develops the theme that began in the creation narratives: God wants to bless humans and all creation through them as they co-rule the world as God's partners.

But what if the humans don't trust God, so they take life and wisdom into their own hands in order to gain the very things God already said he would give them: abundance, security, status, authority, and blessing?

This explains why this little episode is riddled with language and themes from Genesis 1-3.

Genesis 1-4	Genesis 25-27
God creates “human” (Heb. <i>’adam</i> / אָדָם) and installs him with the authority of the firstborn over creation, including the animals.	The twins are born, and the name of the firstborn is “Edom” (<i>’edom</i> / אֶדֶם).
A non-chosen animal, the heel-striking snake, deceives <i>’adam</i> .	The chosen brother, the heel-grabbing Yaaqov, deceives <i>’edom</i> .
The deceived <i>’adam</i> takes and eats food that results in a loss of blessing and the onset of the curse.	The deceived <i>’edom</i> takes and eats food that results in the loss of his firstborn right and his blessing.
The non-chosen firstborn son, Cain, is a shepherd in the field, and is angered by God’s favor on his younger brother.	The non-chosen firstborn son, Esau, is a man of the field and angered by Yaaqov’s deception of his firstborn-right and blessing.
<i>Echoes of Genesis 1-4 in Genesis 25-27. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).</i>	

Reflection Question

What do Yaaqov’s actions and the Bible’s description of him reveal about his attitude toward God’s promises?



Module 2: Isaac's Story and Jacob's Deception

SESSIONS 6-11

Like father, like son: Isaac repeats the deception of his father, Abraham. Study these chapters to see how this pattern shapes Jacob's life.

Session 6: Isaac Deceives Abimelech

Key Takeaways

- God renews his promise to Yitskhaq, echoing the covenants made to previous generations.
- The unusual phrase “on the heel of” means “because.” It recalls the heel of the snake crusher in Genesis 3:15, while keeping Yaaqov the heel grabber on our minds as the story focuses on his father.
- Yitskhaq imitates the deceitful schemes of his father. And instead of blessing the world around him, he brings danger to Abimelech and his people.

The Story of Yitskhaq

The literary design of this unit has been carefully crafted to invite the reader into a meditation on how the children repeat the story of their parents, and how God’s choice of this family means that God’s justice and mercy will also repeat through the generations.

Genesis 26:1-6

- **Famine, journey to Gerar, God’s covenant promise of blessing, seed, and land**

Genesis 26:7-11

- **Yitskhaq’s fear and deception of the Philistines** that puts Rivqah at risk, Avimelek’s noble response

Genesis 26:12-14

- **Yitskhaq’s abundance of seed, land, and possessions from God’s blessing**
- **Yitskhaq sows seed “in that land” (בארץ ההוא) and “finds” (מצא) 100 measures and many servants (עבדה)**

Genesis 26:15-31

- **26:15-25 Disputes with Philistines** over wells, promise of **divine blessing**
- **26:26-31 Dispute with Philistines** resolved through a **covenant oath**, Avimelek’s noble response

Genesis 26:32-33

- Yitskhaq's servants "in that time" (ביום ההוא) "find" (מצא) a well of water that they name "Seven" (שבע)

Genesis 26:1-33. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Summary of Genesis 26:1-14

The opening and closing units form an Eden blessing frame around the story of Yitskhaq's deception, in which he puts the promise of future seed at risk through his fear.

This juxtaposition emphasizes a contrast between God's promise and provision of abundance in the outer frames and the fear, self-preservation, and deception of Yitskhaq in the center.

Notice that in contrast to the parallel story of Abraham and Abimelech in [Genesis 20](#), here God does not appear in the story to tell Abimelech about the true identity of the woman with Yitskhaq. Instead, he finds out on his own, as he gazes out from a tall window.

The Hinge Role

From this perspective, [Genesis 26:12-14](#) forms a concluding frame around the deception story that links back up to [Genesis 26:1-6](#). However, the final line of 26:14 and the keyword links of 26:12-14 show that 26:12-14 is a mirror unit that simultaneously concludes 26:1-14 and introduces the large unit to follow in [Genesis 26:12-33](#).

The transitional unit of 26:12-14 functions as a concluding frame around 26:1-14 and as an introductory frame that spans from 26:12-33.

Yitskhaq's Deception of Abimelech

¹ And there was a **famine** in **the land** ,
besides the first **famine** which was in the days of **Abraham** ,
and Yitskhaq went (הלך) to Abimelek the king of the Philistines **at Gerar** .

² And Yahweh appeared to him,
and he said,

"Don't go down to Egypt!
Dwell in **the land** which I say to you.

³ Migrate in **this land** ,
and I will be with you
and **I will bless you** ,
because to you and to **your seed** I will give all **these lands** ,
and I will establish my oath which I swore to **Abraham** your father,

⁴ and I will multiply **your seed** like the stars of the skies,
and I will give to your seed all **these lands** ,

and **all the nations** of **the land** **will find blessing** for themselves through **your seed** ,

⁵ on the heel of the fact that **Abraham** listened to my voice,
and he kept my keeping, my command, my statute, and my instruction."

⁶ **And Yitskhaq stayed in Gerar** .

⁷ And **the men of the place** asked about **his wife** ,
and **he said** ,

" **She is my sister** ; "

A for he was afraid to say,

" **my wife** . "

" **So that the men of the place** don't **murder me on account of Rivqah** ,
for she is good of sight."

⁸ And it came about, when the days for him there were long,

B that **Abimelech** king of the Philistines looked down through a window,
and he saw, and look: Yitskhaq was **playing with his wife** Rivqah.

⁹ And **Abimelech** called Yitskhaq and he said, "Behold, certainly she is **your wife** !

And how then did **you say** ,

' **She is my sister** '?"

A' And Yitskhaq said to him,

"Because I said,

' **So that I don't die on account of her** . "

¹⁰ And **Abimelech** said,

"What is this you have done to us?

B' One of **the people** might easily **have laid with your wife** ,
and you would have brought guilt upon us."

¹¹ And **Abimelech** commanded all **the people**, saying,

"He who touches this man or **his wife** shall surely be put to death."

¹² And Yitskhaq **sowed seed (זרע)** in **that land**
and he found in the same year a hundred **measures (שערים)** ,
and **Yahweh blessed him** ,

¹³ and the man became **great** ,
and he went on (ילך הלך) growing **great**
until he became very **great** ;

¹⁴ and he had herds of flocks and herds of cattle and many servants,

and the **Philistines** envied him.

Genesis 26:1-14. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

God's Blessing and Oath

God's initial words to Yitskhaq are a blend of all the previous blessing promises in Genesis, with a special focus on the promises to Abraham.

God's Promise to Yitskhaq (Genesis 26:2-5)	God's Promises to Avraham
² Dwell in the land which I say to you . ^{3a} Migrate in this land , and I will be with you and I will bless you ,	Gen. 12:1-2 Go forth from your land, and from your family, and from your father's house, to the land which I will make seen to you ; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you .
^{3b} because to you and to your seed I will give all these lands ,	Gen. 12:7 And Yahweh became seen to Avram and he said, "To your seed I will give this land ." Gen. 13:15 For all the land that you see, to you I will give it, and to your seed , forever.
and I will establish my oath which I swore to Avraham your father,	Gen. 22:16 I swear an oath by myself, utterance of Yahweh, that on account of the fact that you did this thing,
⁴ and I will multiply your seed like the stars of the skies , and I will give to your seed all these lands ,	Gen. 13:16 And I will make your seed like the dust of the land , which, if one was able to count the dust of the land , then also your seed could be counted. Gen. 22:17 that I will certainly bless you, and I will certainly multiply your seed , like the stars of the skies ,
and all the nations of the land will find blessing for themselves through your seed , ⁵ on the heel of the fact that Avraham listened to	Gen. 12:3 ... and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed .

God's Blessing and Oath. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

God's Promise to Yitskhaq (Genesis 26:2-5)	God's Promises to Avraham
my voice , and he kept my keeping, my command, my statute, and my instruction.	Gen. 22:18 and all the nations of the land will find blessing in your seed , on the heel of the fact that he listened to my voice .
God's Blessing and Oath. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

God’s words to Yitskhaq are a careful blend of nearly all of God’s promise speeches to Abraham. Clearly, the divine blessing for Abraham is now being passed onto Yitskhaq, and Yitskhaq, in turn, will pass it on to his sons.

It’s important to remember that this divine blessing takes us all the way back to the creation narrative of Genesis, where humanity was given the initial creation blessing and invitation to co-rule the world as God’s image. This role was forfeited and then passed on to Noah, and now to the family of Abraham.

Humanity	Noah and Family	Avraham and Sarah	Yitskhaq and Rivqah	Yaaqov and Esau
Gen. 1:26-28 “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the land and subdue it ... rule over the creatures ...”	Gen. 9:1-17 “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the land.”	Gen. 12:1-3; 13:15-18; 15; 17; 22:12-17	Gen. 26:1-5	Gen. 27
Be Fruitful and Multiply. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).				

Like Father, Like Son; Unlike Father, Unlike Son

Yitskhaq is replaying Genesis 12, and he is both unlike (he doesn’t go to Egypt) and like his father (he gives away Rivqah).

Yitskhaq in Genesis 26	Avraham in Genesis 20-21	Avram in Genesis 12-13
Gen. 26:1-5 God’s blessing on Yitskhaq		Gen. 13:1-6 God’s blessing on Avram
Yitskhaq Compared to Avraham. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).		

Yitskhaq in Genesis 26	Avraham in Genesis 20-21	Avram in Genesis 12-13
Famine in the land, "Don't go down to Egypt," Yitskhaq goes to Gerar ruled by Avimelek.	Avraham goes to Gerar ruled by Avimelek.	Famine in the land, Avram goes down to Egypt ruled by Pharaoh.
Yitskhaq fears for his life, and deceives the Philistines about his wife. Gen. 26:7 And he said, "She is my sister" for he was afraid to say "my wife," "Lest they kill me ... on account of Rebekah, for she is good of sight."	Avraham fears for his life, and deceives the Philistines about his wife. Gen. 20:2 And Avraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister."	Avram fears for his life, and deceives the Egyptians about his wife. Gen. 12:11-13 And he said to Sarai his wife, "Look now I know that you are a woman beautiful of sight ... the Egyptians ... will kill me and let you live. Say you are my sister."
King Avimelek finds out and confronts Yitskhaq. Gen. 26:10 "What is this you have done to us?"	King Avimelek finds out and confronts Avraham. Gen. 20:9 "What have you done to us?"	King of Egypt finds out and confronts Avram. Gen. 12:18 "What is this you have done to me?"
Gen. 26:11 And Avimelek commanded all the people saying, "the one who touches (נגע) her will surely die."	Gen. 20:6-7 "I have not given you to touch (נגע) her ... And if you do not return her, know that you will surely die."	Gen. 12:20 And Pharaoh gave a command concerning him, and they sent away him and his wife Gen. 12:17 And Yahweh struck (נגע) Pharaoh with great strikes (נגע)
Yitskhaq Compared to Avraham. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).		

The Garden All Over Again

All three of these narratives follow a promise of great blessing for God's chosen one, and all three are filled with hyperlinks to the Eden failure story in [Genesis 2-3](#).

- God provides trees in Eden that are "good of sight and desirable for eating."
- God warns about one forbidden tree that will kill them: "You will surely die."
- The snake deceives the woman and the man about the tree: "You will not die."
- The woman says the forbidden tree "is not to be touched."
- God asks the humans, "What is this you have done?"

The point: Yitskhaq replays the failure of his father and the failure of Adam and Eve in the garden. The son is a deceiver, just like his father.

But notice, Yitskhaq's deception and failure story has been placed after Yaaqov's deception story. This links together all three generations of God's chosen ones in a pattern of deception and failure: like father, like son, like grandson!

Reflection Question

How does Yitskhaq's deception threaten God's plan to bring blessing through Yitskhaq and his descendants?

Session 7: Eden Springs in a Dry Land

Key Takeaways

- Faithful to his promises, God blesses Yitskhaq despite his lack of trust.
- In the biblical narrative, God's blessing often becomes a source of jealousy and rivalry between the chosen and the non-chosen characters.
- The biblical authors weave repeated key words like thread, stitching narrative images into thematic tapestries and adding layers of meaning to interconnected stories.

Yitskhaq's Conflict With Abimelech

15 Now, all **the wells** which **his father's servants had dug** in the days of **Abraham his father**, the Philistines had stopped them up, and they had filled them with dust.

16 And Abimelech said to Yitskhaq,
“**Go (הלך)** away from us,
because **you are more powerful** than us!”

17 **And Yitskhaq went (הלך)** from there,
and he camped in the wadi of Gerar,
and he dwelt (**וישב**) there.

18 And Yitskhaq returned (**וישב**)
and he **dug the wells of water**
which had been **dug** in the days of **his father Abraham**,
which the Philistines had stopped up after the death of Abraham,
and he called their names,
the names which his father had called them.

Dispute #1

19 And **Yitskhaq's servants dug** in the wadi,
and they found there **a well of waters of life**,

20 but the herdsmen of Gerar **quarreled (ריב)** with the herdsmen of Yitskhaq, saying,
“The **waters** are ours!”

And he called the name of the well “**Contention (עשק)**”
because they **contended (התעשקו)** with him.

Dispute #2

21 And **they dug another well** ,
and they also **quarreled (ריב)** over it,
and he called its name "Opposition (שטנה)."

Dispute #3

22 And he moved away from there
and he **dug another well** .
And they did not **quarrel (ריב)** over it;
and he called its name "Wide-places (רחבות),"
and he said,
"Because now Yahweh **has widened a place (הרחיב)** for us,
and we will be **fruitful (פרינו)** in the land."

23 **And he went up from there** to **Beersheba (Well of Seven/Oath)**

24 and Yahweh appeared to him that night and said,

"I am the God of **your father Abraham**.

Do not fear, for I am with you,

and **I will bless you**,

and **multiply (הרביתי)** your descendants,

for the sake of **my servant Abraham**."

25 And he built an altar there,

and called upon the name of Yahweh,

and he pitched his tent there,

and there **the servants of Yitskhaq dug a well** .

Genesis 26:15-25. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

This story is about God's miraculous provision of water from the ground for Yitskhaq in the face of two major obstacles: (1) It's a time of famine (Gen. 26:1), which presumes a drought, and (2) the nations are at odds with God's chosen one through a series of escalating conflicts about access to water.

After we descend from the heights of God's blessing in Genesis 26:1-5 (which recalls the creation blessing of Genesis 1), we now enter the barren deserts of a famine land. But in the middle of the desert, Yitskhaq rediscovers something that the Philistines attempted to stop: access to fresh spring water.

Notice how the design of 26:15-18 highlights the opposition of the Philistines.

A - The **Philistines stopped up** Avraham's wells (Gen. 26:15).

B - **Abimelech banishes** Yitskhaq for fear of his power (Gen. 26:16-17).

A' - Yitskhaq rediscovers Abraham's wells and renames them (Gen. 26:18).

In the face of opposition from the nations, Yitskhaq recovers his father’s wells, and he discovers a new well of “living water” (חיים מים). This is a figure of speech in Hebrew for “running” or “fresh water” (see Lev. 14:5; Jer. 2:13; Zech. 14:8). As a narrative image, it recalls the key turning point in the story about the creation of Eden.

Genesis 2-3	Genesis 26
Gen. 2:4-7 ⁴ In the day when Yahweh Elohim made the land and skies, ⁵ and no shrub of the field was yet in the land, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for Yahweh Elohim had not sent rain upon the land, and there was no human to work the ground, ⁶ but a stream/flow would go up from the land and it would water the whole face of the ground, ⁷ then Yahweh Elohim formed the human of dust from the ground, and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life ; and the human became a living being.	Gen. 26:1 A time of famine. Gen. 26:15-19 Yitskhaq discovers Abraham’s well, that the Philistines had stopped up with dust . Yitskhaq digs in the dirt for new wells and discovers waters of life .
Gen. 2:18-25 God turns the one human into more than one, by taking flesh and “bone” (עצם) from one of his sides.	Gen. 26:16 Avimelek accuses Yitskhaq of becoming too powerful (עצם) because he has too many people and animals in his camp (see Gen. 26:13).
Gen. 3:21-24 Adam and Eve are banished from Eden.	Gen. 26:16 Avimelek banishes Yitskhaq from his city.
<i>Genesis 2-3 Versus Genesis 26. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).</i>	

Recalling motifs in this way is a common narrative strategy of the biblical authors to show how the current story is walking through the sequence of themes set up in Genesis 1-9. Recalling the motifs in this way also sets our expectations in order to introduce a twist.

Sibling Rivalry and Blessing or Curse

Next, the conflict escalates between Yitskhaq’s shepherds and the Philistine shepherds. This story recalls what happened after the Eden creation story: the failure of Adam and Eve and the rising conflict between rival siblings. This is accomplished by recalling the same theme from the story of Abraham—the conflict between Abraham’s shepherds and Lot’s shepherds.

Genesis 13:2, 5-8 Instructor's Translation

² And Avram was very heavy with herds and with silver and with gold ...

⁵ Now, also belonging to Lot, who went with Avram,
were flocks and cattle and tents ...

⁷ And there was **a dispute between the shepherds of the herd of Avram and between the shepherds of the herd of Lot ...**

⁸ And Avram said to Lot,
“Don’t let there be **disputing between me and between you, between my shepherds and between your shepherds,**
for we men are brothers!”

Genesis 26:14, 19-20 Instructor's Translation

¹⁴ and [Yitskhaq] had possessions of flocks
and herds and a great household, and the
Philistines envied him.

¹⁹ And the servants of Yitskhaq dug in the valley
and they found there a well of living water,

²⁰ **and the shepherds of Gerar disputed with the shepherds of Yitskhaq,** saying,

“The water is ours!”

The dispute between the shepherds recalls the exact same scene from the story of Abraham and Lot. In that story, God’s blessing on Abraham that resulted in many possessions is the very thing that creates the conflict among rival family members.

This recalls the motif of Cain and Abel’s sibling rivalry after the banishment from Eden, along with a very subtle clue.

- The very center of the paragraph in Genesis 26:15-25 focuses on the second dispute between the shepherd of Yitskhaq and Philistia. This dispute is singled out by its unique formula that sets it apart from the first and third dispute.
- The second disputed well is named *Sitnah*, that is, “Satan-place” (שטנה). It’s a use of the noun “satan” in its literal sense, “opposition.” And while on the narrative level it simply describes the conflict between rival tribes, it also recalls the important analogy between sin in Genesis 4:7 and the snake in Genesis 3.

A Flood, a Tent, an Altar, and a Blessing

After an extremely subtle walk through the themes of Genesis 1-4, the narrative highlights the rising conflict regarding the wells of water. This is a very subtle recall from the paragraph that described the rising waters of the flood in Genesis 7:17-20.

Genesis 7:17-20 Instructor's Translation

¹⁷ And the flood was forty days upon the land,
and the waters were **great** (רבה)
and they lifted up the ark,

and it rose up over the land,

¹⁸ and the waters were **mighty** (גבר)

and they were very **great** (רבה) upon the land,

and the ark went on the face of the waters,

¹⁹ and the waters were **mighty** (גבר), very very much, upon the land,

and they covered all the high mountains which are under the skies, ²⁰ fifteen cubits above,

the waters were **mighty** (גבר),

and they covered the mountains;

The word “mighty” (גבר) is the same Hebrew root of the word “mighty warrior” (גבור) that refers to the Nephilim and also to powerful ancient Near Eastern kings who were violent and volatile (Nimrod in [Gen. 10:8-1](#)). Recall that these Philistine shepherds are servants of King Abimelech of Philistia, who sees Yitskhaq’s presence as a threat to his power. That is, Abimelech is also a *gibbor* (גבור), whose servants are causing a “rising flood” of conflict over the waters!

In the midst of this conflict, God provides for Yitskhaq, who goes off and finds a place of rest associated with the images of Noah’s story during and after the flood.

Genesis 8-9	Genesis 26
Gen. 8:6-10 Noah waits for multiple series of “seven” (שבע) days as the waters recede	Gen. 26:23-25 Yitskhaq goes to “Well of Seven” (באר שבע) and finds water there in the midst of the famine and drought
Gen. 8:20-21 Noah builds an altar	Gen. 26:25 Yitskhaq builds an altar
Gen. 9:1-3 Noah is blessed by God and promised a large family	Gen. 26:24 Yitskhaq is blessed by God and promised a large family
Gen. 9:19-21 Noah sets up a tent in a garden	Gen. 26:25 Yitskhaq sets up his tent at “Well of Seven”
<i>Flood Imagery in Yitskhaq’s Story. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).</i>	

This is a not-so-conspicuous recall of the story of Noah after the flood, mirrored in the story of Yitskhaq. But one major theme is absent: The conflict that started the flood is resolved through a covenant. And that’s what the next paragraph of the Yitskhaq story is all about.

Reflection Question

The biblical authors connect each scene in the Genesis scroll to a repeating pattern of themes established in its early chapters. What connections to earlier stories come to mind while studying [Genesis 26:12-25](#)? How do these connections help us meditate on the meaning of this story?

Session 8: Reconciled Through Covenant

Key Takeaways

- Yitskhaq's story in Genesis 26 is the whole biblical narrative in miniature, and it ends with this scene of reconciliation through covenant.
- The biblical authors use garden of Eden imagery to talk about the reconciliation of rival families, linking this theme to God's ultimate purpose of bringing blessing to all people through his chosen one.

Yitskhaq and Abimelech Make a Covenant of Peace

26 Now, Avimelek **came to him** from Gerar,
and **his companion** Ahuzzath,
and Phicol the commander of his army.

27 And Yitskhaq said to them,
"Why have **you come to me**,
since **you hate me**,
and **you sent me away from you**?"

28 And they said,
"We can surely see that **Yahweh is with you**,
and we say,
'Let there now be an **oath-curse** between us,
between you and us,
and let us make a **covenant** with you,
29 that you will do no **bad** to us,
just as we have not touched you
and we have done to you nothing but **good**
and we will send you away in peace.
You are now the one **blessed by Yahweh.**"

30 And he made them a feast,
and they ate and drank.

31 And arose early in the morning,
and they **swore oaths**, **each to his brother**
and Yitskhaq sent them away

and they went from him in peace .

³² And it came about on the same day,
that Yitskhaq's servants came,
and they told him about the well which they had dug
and they said to him, " We have found water ."
³³ And he called it " Oath ";
therefore the name of the city is " Well of Oath " to this day.

Genesis 26:26-33. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Tribal Rivalry Reconciled Through Covenant

Just like after the flood, when God reconciled with violent humans through a covenant, here potentially violent humans reconcile through covenant.

Note: The seemingly random mention of "Phicol, commander of the army" ([Gen. 26:26](#)) is a subtle recall of the "sons of *elohim*" and their violent warrior offspring, the Nephilim from [Genesis 6:1-4](#). The sons of *elohim* can also be called "the army of the skies" (a.k.a. "the host of heaven," see [1 Kgs. 22:19](#) and [Job 1:6-8](#)). Here in the Yitskhaq story, the presence of Phicol makes us think of the mutant warriors of [Genesis 6:4](#), but only to twist our expectation. Now, the warriors come to make peace with God's chosen one!

Just as Abimelech made peace with Abraham (about a disputed well!) through a covenant in [Genesis 21:21-34](#), so now Abimelech makes a similar pact with Abraham's son about disputed wells.

This story becomes a narrative image of how Yahweh wants to spread the Eden blessing out to the nations through his chosen family. It requires courageous honesty in his chosen one (Yitskhaq, who fails at first), and it requires an openness among the nations to receive God's chosen one (Abimelech, who also fails at first). But both of these failures are reversed by the end of [Genesis 26](#), and the nations reconcile and live in peace through the covenant at the Well of Seven!

The point: When God's chosen one simply trusts the promise, they discover God's life-giving blessing even in the midst of death and desert. When the nations acknowledge God's chosen one, they find themselves included in the Eden blessing through the covenant!

Concluding Reflections on the Stories of Yitskhaq and Abraham

As we conclude the story of Yitskhaq, we see how every part of his story has been mapped onto the story of his father Abraham.

Avraham entered Canaan in a time of famine.	Yitskhaq comes of age in Canaan in a time of famine.
Avraham put God's promise and his wife at risk because of fear (the Pharaoh and Avimelek debacles).	Yitskhaq puts God's promise and his wife at risk because of fear (the Avimelek debacle).
Avraham became wealthy because of God's blessing, and this caused rivalry and conflict with the non-chosen (Avraham and Lot).	Yitskhaq became wealthy because of God's blessing, and this caused rivalry and conflict with the non-chosen.
This conflict with the nations, about wells, was only resolved through a covenant.	This conflict with the nations, about wells, was only resolved through a covenant.
<i>Reflections on the Stories of Yitskhaq and Avraham.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

This is a very clear narrative strategy that shows how the son's life is a replay and twist on the story of the father's life. Which makes us wonder about Yitskhaq's sons. Will they also replay the story of their father's failures and successes?

- Abraham had conflict with Lot, Pharaoh, and Abimelech.
- Yitskhaq has conflict with Abimelech that is resolved through covenant.
- Yaaqov will have conflict with Esau.
- Yaaqov and his descendants will also have a conflict with Pharaoh.

Reflection Question

How does Yitskhaq's story tell the whole biblical narrative in miniature?

Session 9: Rebekah's Plan to Deceive Isaac

Key Takeaways

- The biblical narrative consistently critiques polygamy by always putting front and center the abuse, neglect, and objectification these women have to endure at the hands of men who accumulate wives.
- Rivqah hatches a plot that unfolds to the melody of the Genesis 3 failure story.

Yaaqov's Deceives His Brother and Father

This large section has three parts of unequal length, but there is a clear organization of the parts based on repeated words and the plot. (The chart below is adapted from Andrew Teeter, "Genesis Class Notes" and from the principles in his essay, "[Biblical Symmetry and Its Modern Detractors](#)," a paper delivered at the 2019 International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament.)

Genesis 26:34-35

- Esau takes **Hittite wives**

Genesis 27:1-40

- A - 27:1-5 **Yitskhaq & Esau** : The **father's plan** to **bless** his favored son **before his death**
A' - 27:6-17 **Rivqah & Yaaqov** : The **mother's counter-plan** to **bless** her favored son
B - 27:18-29 **Yaaqov & Yitskhaq** : Younger son enacts the **counter-plan**, **poem of blessing**
B' - 27:30-40 **Yitskhaq & Esau** : Older son finds out and is angry, **poem of non-blessing**

Genesis 27:41-28:9

- A - 27:41 **Son Esau's speech-plan** about murdering Yaaqov **after his father's death**
A' - 27:42-45 **Rivqah's counter-plan speech** to Yaaqov
B - 27:46 **Rivqah's speech to Yitskhaq** : **counter-plan** to save Yaaqov, "I hate **Hittite wives**"
B' - 28:1-5 **Yitskhaq's speech to Yaaqov** fulfills Rivqah's **counter-plan**, "No **Hittite wives**"
B'' - 28:6-7 **Son Esau** sees Yaaqov's **blessing**
B'' - 28:8-9 **Son Esau** sees **Hittite wives** evil in father's eyes, and takes **Ishmaelite wife**

Genesis 26:34-28:9. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Part one (Gen. 26:34-35) is a short narrative about Esau marrying two Hittite wives (like Lemek in Gen. 4:19-24) who are a source of contention with his parents. This opening panel matches the closing panels in part three (

Gen. 27:46-28:5 and 28:6-9) where Esau's wives become a partial motivation for sending Yaaqov to Mesopotamia and Esau takes another wife from a tribe related to his uncle Abraham.

The inner parts are bound together by two symmetrical cycles of plans and deceptive counterplans.

1. Deception Cycle 1 (27:1-40): Parents' Plans and the Blessing

- Yitskhaq selfishly plans to pass the divine blessing on to Esau in exchange for his favorite venison, even though the boys' birth oracle clearly stated that the older would be subservient to the younger (Gen. 25:23).
- Rivqah concocts a counterplan to obtain the blessing for her favorite son.
- In the following narrative about Yaaqov and Yitskhaq, the counterplan leads to an ill-gotten blessing. After that, in a story about Yitskhaq and Esau, the counterplan becomes known and leads to a non-blessing.

2. Deception Cycle 2 (27:41-28:5): Esau's Plan and the Family

- Esau plans to murder his deceptive brother for stealing his firstborn right and his blessing.
- Rivqah concocts a counterplan to save her son's life, which requires sending him into exile to her brother's family in Mesopotamia.
- In the following narrative about Yaaqov and Yitskhaq, Rivqah's plan is repeated and carried out. After that, Esau sees all this and realizes his wives are offensive to his parents, so he marries yet again.

Not only does Genesis 26:34-28:9 display a tight coherence through this symmetrical design, each of the key elements in this section picks up and develops specific themes from its matching part back in Genesis 25:19-34.

Genesis 25:19-34

- Rival sons born: Esau and Yaaqov
- Parents each have a favorite son
- Yaaqov usurps Esau's **firstborn right (Heb. *bekorah*)** with a meal

Genesis 26:1-33

- Yitskhaq the deceiver is blessed among the Philistines

Genesis 26:34-28:9

- Rival sons are older: Esau and Yaaqov
- Parents each favor one son
- Rivqah and Yaaqov usurp Yitskhaq and Esau's plans of **blessing (Heb. *berakah*)** with a meal

Genesis 25:19-28:9. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Key Words from Genesis 25:19-34

Gen. 25:20

“ And Yitskhaq was a son of forty years when he **took** Rivqah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan-aram, for himself as a wife.”

Gen. 25:28 Parents each love one favored son
“Yitskhaq **loved** Esau, because hunted-game was in his mouth, but Rivqah **loved** Yaaqov.”

Gen. 25:23 Birth oracle poem
“The **greater** will **serve** the **little one**”

Gen. 25:31-34 Yaaqov swindles Esau out of his **firstborn-right** (בכרה) for a meal
“and he ate and he drank”

Gen. 25:25 Esau comes out hairy (שער)

Gen. 25:26 Yaaqov is named for his behavior
“And his hand was grabbing **the heel** (‘aqev) of Esau, and his named was called **Yaaqov**.”

Gen. 25:22 Rivqah’s laments her difficult pregnancy
“If this is how it is, **why me** (למה זה אנכי)?!”

Key Words from Genesis 26:34-28:9

Gen. 26:34-35

“ **And Esau was a son of forty years and he took** Yehudith daughter of Beeriy the Hittite and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite, and they were a bitterness of spirit for Yitskhaq and Rivqah.”

Gen. 27:2-4 Yitskhaq wants to bless his favored son
“Hunt some hunted-game for me, and make me tasty-things just like I **love** ... so that I can bless you.”

Gen. 27:29 Blessing poem for Yaaqov
“May peoples **serve** you, and may people groups bow down to you. Be mightier than **your brother**, and may **your mother’s sons** bow down to you.”

Gen. 27:18-30 Yaaqov tricks Yitskhaq and gets Esau’s **blessing** (ברכה) for a meal
“and he ate ... and he drank,”

Gen. 27:15-16 Yaaqov dresses with animal hair (שער) to imitate his brother.

Gen. 27:36
“Isn’t his name called **Yaaqov**, for he has **heel-grabbed** (Yaaqeveni) me these two times?”

Gen. 27:46 Rivqah laments Yaaqov’s wife prospects
“If Yaaqov takes a Hittite wife ... **why should I live** (למה לי חיים)?!”

Keywords from Genesis 25:19-28:9. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Genesis 26:34-35 Instructor's Translation

³⁴ And Esau was a son of forty years, when he took a wife,

Judith, daughter of Beerli the Hittite,
and Basemath, daughter of Elon the Hittite,
³⁵ and they were a bitterness of spirit for Isaac and Rebekah.

The Many Wives of the Non-Chosen

This short narrative about Esau's wives matches the concluding panel of this section of the Yaaqov story in Genesis 27:41-28:9, which also focuses on Yaaqov and Esau's wives.

Esau is set on analogy with the non-chosen lineage of Cain that culminated in the seventh generation from Adam and Eve, Lemek.

Lemek is the first figure in the story of the Bible to take two wives (Gen. 4:19), which deviates from the ideal portrait of Adam and Eve in Eden (Gen. 2:24).

Just as Lemek is a heightened image of Cain's violence, Esau will continue that heritage of volatility and violence toward his brother.

Esau takes "Hittite" wives, that is, wives from outside his extended family. The last Hittites we met were those living in Hebron, with whom Abraham negotiated to buy the plot of land and the burial cave of Makpelah (see Gen. 23). The Hittites, as such, have not been portrayed in negative terms. But Abraham did show great concern that Yitskhaq not marry a "daughter of the Canaanites" (Gen. 24:3), and that he should only marry some from Shem's chosen lineage (Gen. 24:7-8). The fact that Esau would marry outside the extended family is grievous to Yitskhaq and Rivqah, and only furthers the narrative portrait that Esau is not the son who will inherit the blessing of Eden given to their family.

Esau is depicted as merging into the culture of Canaan. But it is surely ironic that Esau married a Canaanite woman named Yehudith ("Woman of Judah")!

Yitskhaq's Plan and Rivqah's Counterplan

A- Yitskhaq's Plan to Esau

¹ And it came about when **Yitskhaq was old** ,
and his eyes became weak,
and he called Esau his son, his big one,

and he said to him, "My son!"
And he said to him, "Look, it's me."

² And he said, "Look, **I am old** .
I do not know the day of **my death** .

³ And now, please lift up your tools and your quiver and your bow,
and go out to the field,
and hunt for me hunted-game,

⁴ and **make for me tasty-things just as I love,**

and **bring it to me so I may eat** ,
on account of which my being can bless you before I die .”

5 Now, Rivqah was listening
as Yitskhaq spoke to Esau his son,
and Esau went to the field to hunt hunted-game to bring.

A' - Rivqah's Counterplan to Yaaqov

6 **But Rivqah said to Yaaqov her son** , saying,
“Look, I have listened to your father speaking to Esau your brother, saying,
7 **‘Bring to me hunted-game,**
and make for me tasty-things,
so I can eat and **so I can bless you** before Yahweh **before my death** .”
8 So now, my son, **listen to my voice** , to what I am commanding you:
9 Please **go** to the flock,
and **take** for me from there two kids of goats, good ones,
and **I will make them as tasty-things for your father, just as he loves,**
10 and you will bring them to your father,
and he will eat , **on account of which he will bless you** before his death .”

11 **And Yaaqov said to Rivqah his mother** ,
“Look, Esau my brother is a man of hair,
and I am a man of smoothness.
12 Perhaps my father will feel me,
and I will be like a deceiver in his eyes,
and I will bring upon myself a **curse** and not a **blessing** .”

13 **And his mother said to him** ,
“May your **curse** be upon me, my son.
However, **listen to my voice** ,
and **go, take** for me!”

A" - Rivqah's Counterplan Begins

14 And he **went**
and he **took** ,
and he brought to his mother,
and his mother **made tasty-things just as his father loved.**

15 And Rivqah **took** the clothes of her son, the bigger one,
the desirable ones that were with her in the house,
and she clothed Yaaqov her son, the smaller one,

¹⁶ and the skins of the kids of goats
she clothed upon his hands,
and upon the smoothness of his neck.

¹⁷ And she **gave** **the tasty things** and the bread which she made
into the hand of Yaaqov her son.

¹⁸ And he **went** to his father,

Genesis 27:1-18. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Like Hungry Father, Like Hungry Son

In Genesis 25:19-34, we saw Yitskhaq and Rivqah contrasted with Abraham and Sarah. When faced with the challenge of infertility, Yitskhaq turned to Yahweh in prayer and discovered God's creative power to bring about life out of non-life.

In that story, Rivqah and Yitskhaq were offered an oracle about their two sons: the older would be a servant to the younger. The Eden blessing that Yitskhaq receives in Genesis 26:1-5 is to be passed onto the younger son, not the older. But we know from Genesis 25:27 that "Yitskhaq loved Esau, because hunted game was in his mouth."

Just as Esau's appetite overpowered him and drove him to foolishly trade his *bekorah* ("firstborn right") for a bowl of food, so now Yitskhaq will give away God's *berakah* to the son God didn't choose.

Like Deceptive Mother, Like Deceptive Son

Similar to the father/son analogy between Esau and Yitskhaq, the narrative highlights a mother/son analogy between Yaaqov and Rivqah.

Just as Yaaqov swindled Esau out of the firstborn right for a bowl of food, now Rivqah will trick Yitskhaq into given the Eden blessing to her favored son.

Everyone's motives in this story are twisted and self-oriented. No one seems aware that the story of God's pursuit of humanity is at stake here!

The Language of Genesis 2-3

This story is riddled with the vocabulary of the Eden-failure story from Genesis 2-3. The two stories have been brought into a meaningful relationship that illuminates the narrative gaps in both scenes.

The key vocabulary items repeated in both stories are:

- Knowledge and death
- Man and woman (who are husband and wife)
- Eyes, see, take, desire, give, eat
- Blessing, curse
- Listen to the voice

Adam and Eve/Yitskhaq and Esau are willing to contradict the word of God (about the tree/about the sons) in pursuit of their own purposes (desire to eat).

The women's plans (Eve and Rivqah) are to achieve a good goal but in the wrong timing and in the wrong way.

- Eve's desire for knowledge is not in and of itself wrong.
- Rivqah's desire to make sure the younger son is blessed is not in and of itself wrong.
- What is wrong is that the women achieve their goals by violating the divine word.

In Eve's story, she is deceived and led along by her desire. In Rivqah's story, she is led by her desire, and so she becomes a deceiver.

The deceiver's desire is to usurp the place of the firstborn in the family.

- In Genesis 3, the deceiving snake (who was made subject to the humans in Gen. 1:26-28) deceives the latecomer in order to usurp their authority over the animals.
- In Genesis 27, the deceiving mother and son (who was elevated in Gen. 25) deceives the firstborn to usurp his authority.

The deceiver brings a curse upon themselves for their treachery (Gen. 3:14, 27:12-13).

Yaaqov is disguised with the form of an animal skin to deceive his father. Is the snake form also a "disguise" of a spiritual being?

The snake says that only after eating the fruit will the humans' eyes be opened (the implication being that their eyes are closed in some way). Rivqah and Yaaqov can only deceive Yitskhaq because his eyes are "closed" from old age.

Genesis 26:34-28:9	Genesis 1-3
Gen. 27:1 "And [Yitskhaq's] eyes were weak/dim to be seeing"	Gen. 3 The humans' eyes are "opened" because of the forbidden food.
Gen. 27:4, 7 Yitskhaq requests that Esau bring fresh game "that I may eat (אכל), on account of which (בעבור) my being will bless you (ברוך) before I die (מוות)."	Gen. 3:6 "and she took and she ate (אכל)" Gen. 3:17 " cursed (ארורה) is the ground on account of you (בעבורך)"
Gen. 27:8 "And now my son, listen to my voice (בקול שמע) to what I am commanding (צויה) you."	Gen. 3:17 "And to the man he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice (בקול + שמע) of your wife and ate of the tree that I commanded (צוה) you ...'"
<i>Detailed Comparison of Genesis 27-28 and Genesis 2-3. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).</i>	

Genesis 26:34-28:9

Genesis 1-3

Gen. 27:9 "Go now to the flock **and take** (לק"ח) for me two young goats, **good ones** (טוב) ... **that he may eat** (אכל) and **bless** (ברך) you before **his death** (מות)"

Gen. 3:6 "And she took (לקח) from its fruit and she ate (אכל)"

Gen. 27:12-13 "'Perhaps I will be **in his eyes** (עיניו) like one who makes a mockery, and I will bring upon myself **a curse and not a blessing** ' (ברכה ולא קללה). And she said, 'May your **curse** (קללה) be upon me my son. Just **listen to my voice** (בקול שמ"ע) and go and **take** (לק"ח) for me.'"

Gen. 3:17 "And to the man he said, 'Because **you have listened to the voice** (בקול + שמע) of your wife and ate of the tree that I **commanded** (צוה) you ... **cursed** (ארורה) is the ground on account of you.'"

Gen. 27:14-15 "And he went **and he took** (ויקח) and he brought to his mother ... And **she took** (ותקח) the clothes of Esau her son, the bigger one, **the desirable ones** (החמדה) which were with her ..."

Gen. 3:6 "And the woman saw that the tree was good for eating, and desirable (תאוה) to the eyes, and desirable (נחמד) for becoming wise, and she took (לקח) ..."

Gen. 27:15 "And she **clothed** (ותלבש) Yaaqov her son, the little one, and with **the skins** (ערת) of the goats **she clothed** (והלבישה) over **his hands** "

Gen. 3:21 "And God made for the man and his wife garments of **skin** (עור) and he **clothed them** (וילבשם)"

Gen. 27:17 "And she gave (ותתן) the tasty foods and the bread which she made into the hand of Yaaqov her son."

Gen. 3:6 "and she took from its fruit and she ate and she gave (ותתן) to her husband and he ate."

Gen. 27:33 "Who then is the one who hunted game and brought to me **and I ate from all** (מכל ואכל) ..."

Gen. 2:16 "from every/all (מכל) trees in the garden you may eat (תאכל);" cf. also Gen. 3:1-2

Gen. 27:35-36 "'Your brother came in **deceit** (במרמה), **and he took** (ויקח) your blessing.' And [Esau] said, 'Isn't he rightly called **heel/deceiver** (יעקב), for he **heeled/deceived** (עק"ב) **me two times? He took** (לק"ח) **my birthright** (בכרה), and **he took** (לק"ח) **my blessing** (ברכה).'"

Gen. 3:13 "And she said, 'The snake deceived me (נשא) and I ate'"

Detailed Comparison of Genesis 27-28 and Genesis 2-3. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Genesis 26:34-28:9	Genesis 1-3
Gen. 27:43 "And now my son, listen to my voice (בקול שמ"ע)"	Gen. 3:17 "because you have listened to the voice (שמע + בקול) of your wife"
Gen. 27:45 "Dwell [in Aram] for a few days, until ... he forgets that which you have done to him (לו עשית אשר את)"	Gen. 3:13 "and God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done? (מה זאת עשית)'" Gen. 3:14 "And God said to the snake, 'Because you have done this thing (זאת עשית כי) ...'"
Gen. 28:3 "May El Shaddai bleess you and make you fruitful and multiply ."	Gen. 1:28 "And God blessed them and said be fruitful and multiply "
<i>Detailed Comparison of Genesis 27-28 and Genesis 2-3. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).</i>	

Reflection Question

How is Genesis 27:1-18 a meditation on children replaying and intensifying the failures of their ancestors?

Session 10: Isaac Blesses Jacob

Key Takeaways

- The scenes of Yaaqov and Esau asking blessing from their father are constructed to mirror each other: Yaaqov's deception and blessing reflects Esau's revelation of the truth and non-blessing.
- Yitskhaq introduces new vocabulary to the Eden blessing theme.
- Esau's non-blessing links him to previous non-chosen sons, Cain and Ishmael.

Yaaqov's Deception

- 18 And he said,
"My father."
And he said,
"Look, it's me.
Who are you, my son?"
- 19 And Yaaqov said to his father,
"**I am Esau**, your **firstborn (בכרד)**.
I have made just as you spoke to me.
Rise up, please, sit and **eat from my hunted-game,**
on account of which your being can bless (ברד) me."
- 20 And Yitskhaq said to his son,
"What is this, that you found so quickly, my son?"
And he said,
"Because Yahweh your Elohim caused it to happen before me."
- 21 And Yitskhaq said to Yaaqov,
"**Come near**, please, **so I can feel you**, my son,
if **you are my son Esau** or not."
- 22 **And Yaaqov came near** to Yitskhaq his father,
and he felt him,
and he said,
"The voice is the voice of Yaaqov,
but **the hands are the hands of Esau.**"
- 23 And he did not recognize him,
because **his hands were like the hand of Esau** his brother, hairy.
And he blessed him.
- 24 And he said, "**You are my son, Esau?**"

And he said, "I am."

25 And he said,
"Come near to me,
so I can eat from the hunted-game, my son,
so that my being can bless you."
And he came near to him,
and he ate,
and he brought him wine,
and he drank.

26 And Yitskhaq his father said to him,
"Come near, please, and kiss me, my son."
27 And he came near and kissed him,
and he smelled the smell of his clothes,
and he blessed him and said,

Poem of Blessing

"Look, the smell of my son,
like of the smell of a field that Yahweh has blessed.
28 May Yahweh give you from the dew of the skies,
and from the fatness of the land,
and much grain and fresh wine.
29 May peoples serve you,
and may people groups bow down to you.
Be more mighty than your brother,
and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.
Those who curse you are cursed,
and those who bless you are blessed."

30 And it came about when Yitskhaq finished blessing Yaaqov,
and it was, indeed, just as he went outside from the face of Yitskhaq his father,
that Esau his brother came in from his hunting.

31 And he also made tasty-things,
and he brought to his father,
and he said to him,
"Let my father arise,
so he can eat from the hunted-game of his son,
on account of which your being may bless me."

32 And Yitskhaq his father said to him,
"Who are you?"
And he said,
"I am your son, your firstborn, Esau."

33 **And Yitskhaq trembled a great trembling, very much,**
and he said,

“Who, then, was it who **hunted game**
and brought to me,
and I ate it all before you came,
and I blessed him ...?
Indeed, **he will be the blessed one.**”

34 When Esau heard the words of his father,
then he cried a crying out, great and bitter, very much,
and he said to his father,

“**Bless me too**, my father!”

35 And he said,
“Your brother came with **deception (מרמה)**,
and he took **your blessing**.”

36 And he said,
“Isn’t he rightly called **‘Yaaqov’ (יעקב)**,
so that **he grabbed my heel (יעקבני)** these two times?!
He took **my firstborn-right**,
and look, now he has taken **my blessing**!”

And he said,
“Don’t you have a **blessing** reserved for me?”

37 **And Yitskhaq responded**
and he said to Esau,

“Look, I have set him as mightier than you,
and all his brothers I have given to him as servants,
and I supported him with grain and new wine.
So, for you, my son, what then can I do?”

38 And Esau said to his father,
“Is it just one **blessing** that you have, my father?
Bless me too, my father!”

And he lifted up his voice, and he wept.

39 **And Yitskhaq his father responded**,
and he said to him,

Poem of Non-Blessing

“Look, away from the fatness of the land,
there will be your dwelling,
and away from the dew of the skies above.
40 And by your sword you will live,
and you will serve your brother,
and it will come about when you wander free,
then you will break his yoke from upon your neck.”

The Poems of Blessing and Non-Blessing

The Eden blessing passed to Yaaqov through Yitskhaq is packed with hyperlinks to earlier statements of the blessing and to Eden symbolism.

The Blessing on Yaaqov: Genesis 27:27-29	The Blessings on Humanity and Avraham
²⁷Look, the smell of my son, like of the smell of a field that Yahweh has blessed. ²⁸May Yahweh give you from the dew of the skies, and from the fatness of the land, and much grain and fresh wine.	Edenic images of abundance: • “dew of the skies” = water that mysteriously appears and disappears, a gift of the skies • “fat of the land” = the most valuable produce • “grain and fresh wine” = the best produce
²⁹May peoples serve you, and may people groups bow down to you. Be more mighty than your brother, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.	Gen. 1:28 Rule and Authority “And Elohim blessed them, and Elohim said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the land, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea ...”
Those who curse you are cursed, and those who bless you are blessed.	Gen. 12:2-3 “And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”
<i>The Blessings on Yaaqov, Humanity, and Avraham. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).</i>	

The first element of fertility and abundance echoes the strong Eden themes that have accompanied every mention of the blessing.

The final element speaks to God’s promise to protect Yaaqov from anyone who treats him as if he’s cursed instead of blessed. This repeats the promise God made to Abraham, and it recalls the moments when God took Abraham’s side (as in Genesis 14), even when he did not deserve it (as in Gen. 12:10-20).

The middle element, however, is new, and it's important to remember that Yitskhaq thinks he is speaking to Esau, not Yaaqov.

- The primacy and authority over one's brother is broadened to include authority over other people groups and all other siblings, which in this narrative includes only Esau.
- However, this novel element of the blessing is anticipating the final large movement of Genesis, about how two of Yaaqov's sons rise to prominence and receive the obedience and obeisance of their brothers and the nations.

Genesis 37:9-11 Instructor's Translation

⁹ And **Yoseph** dreamed again, another dream,
and he recounted it to his brothers,
and he said,
"Look, I dreamed a dream again,
and look, **the sun and the moon and eleven
stars were bowing down to me**."

¹⁰ And he recounted to his father and to his brothers,
and his father rebuked him,
and he said to him,
"What is this dream that you have dreamed?
**Will we really, I and your mother and your
brothers, come to bow down to you** on the
ground?!"

¹¹ And his brothers were jealous of him ...

Genesis 49:8-10 Instructor's Translation

⁸ **Yehudah**, as for you, **your brothers will praise you**.
Your hand will be on the neck of your enemies,
your father's sons will bow down to you.

⁹ A young lion is Yehudah
from the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He crouches, he lies down, like a lion,
and like a young lion, who will rouse him?

¹⁰ The scepter will not depart from Yehudah
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
unto when he comes to whom it belongs,
and the obedience of the peoples will belong to him.

The Poem of Non-Blessing

Yitskhaq gives to Esau an anti-version of the blessing he gave to Yaaqov. The language of the non-blessing contains hyperlinks that set Esau on analogy with Ishmael, Abraham's favored firstborn.

There are also allusions to the future of Esau's descendants, the Edomites, and their rebellion against the Israelites.

Analogies between Esau and Ishmael:

- Esau is told to “take up your gear, your quiver and your bow” ([Gen. 27:2](#)). // Ishmael will live in the wilderness by his bow ([Gen. 21:20](#)).
- “Is there only one blessing you have? Bless me also, my father.’ And Esau lifted his voice and wept.” ([Gen. 27:38](#)) // Hagar who seeks a blessing for her unchosen son “lifted her voice and she wept.” ([Gen. 21:16](#)) In Ishmael’s case, his mother weeps for him, but in Esau’s case, he has to weep for his own loss.
- Esau will live away from the fruitful land and will survive by his sword ([Gen. 27:39-40](#)). // Ishmael will live to the east of Yitskhaq and will live by his bow ([Gen. 16:12](#), [21:20](#)).

Gen. 27:39b-40

By your sword you will live,
and you will be a servant to your brother,
and it will be that when you rebel,
then you will tear away his yoke
from upon your neck.

1 Kings 11:14

Then the Lord raised up a *satan* to Solomon, Hadad the Edomite; he was of the royal seed in Edom.

2 Kings 8:20-22

²⁰ In [those] days **Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah** , and made a king over themselves ... ²² **So Edom revolted against Judah to this day** .

Forward Hyperlinks to Future Rivalry of Edom and Israel. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Reflection Question

What do Yitskhaq’s words and actions show us about his attitude toward the blessing he is invested with?

Session 11: Parting of the Brothers

Key Takeaways

- The separation of Yaaqov and Esau resounds with notes of the Cain and Abel theme, but with many inversions and surprises.
- Rivqah indeed receives the curse for her scheming with Yaaqov when she says goodbye to her beloved son, never to see him again.
- Esau, in his anger, is set on analogy to both Cain and God, presenting a complex portrait of Yaaqov's adversary.

Esau's Anger and Yaaqov's Flight

41 And Esau was opposed to Yaaqov,
on account of the **blessing** with which his father **blessed** him,
and Esau said in his heart,

“The days of mourning for my father draw near,
and **I will murder Yaaqov my brother.**”

42 And it was reported to Rivqah, the words of **Esau her son, the greater one**,
and she sent and called for **Yaaqov her son, the smaller one**,
and she said to him,

“Look, **Esau your brother** is comforting himself about you, **to murder you!**

43 So now, my son, listen to my voice,
and arise, flee for yourself to **Lavan**, my brother, to **Haran**.

44 And you will dwell with him one set of days,
until **the hot-anger of your brother turns away**,

45 until **the anger of your brother turns away from you**,
and he forgets what you have done to him,
and I will send and take you from there.

Why should I be bereaved of the two of you in one day?!”

Genesis 27:41-45. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Esau, Cain, and the Flood-Sending God

In Genesis 27:41, Esau is set on analogy with Cain who is angry at God's favor on his brother, and also with God who responds to human evil by sending the flood.

Esau in Genesis 27

Gen. 27:34 and [Esau] **cried out a great cry** (ויצעק צעקה)

Gen. 27:41 And Esau held a grudge against Yaaqov ... and **he said in his heart** (בלבו + אמר), "The days of **mourning** (אבל / הבל) are near, and I will **murder Yaaqov my brother** (אחי + הרג)."

Gen. 27:42 Behold, Esau **your brother is consoling himself** (נחם) regarding you, **to murder you** (הרג).

Cain & Abel in Genesis 4

Gen. 4:8 And Qayin spoke to **Hevel (הבל) his brother**, and it came about when they were in the field that Qayin rose up to Hevel **his brother and he murdered him** (הרג + אח).

Gen. 4:10 What have you done? The voice of the shed-blood of your brother is **crying out** (צעק) to me from the ground.

Yahweh in Genesis 6

Gen. 6:5-13 And Yahweh saw that multiplied was the badness of humanity in the land, and every purpose of the plans of **his heart** (לבו) was only bad all the day, and Yahweh **consolated himself** (נחם) that he made humanity in the land, and he was pained **in his heart** (לבו). And Yahweh said, "I will wipe away humanity that I created from the face of the ground, from humanity to animals to creeping things and to birds of the skies, for **I console myself** (נחם) that I have made them. ..."

And Elohim said to Noah, "**The end** (קץ) of all flesh has **come before me**, because the land is filled with violence because of them, and behold, I am going to ruin them with land."

Gen. 8:21 And Yahweh smelled the soothing smell; and Yahweh **said to his heart** (לבו), "I will never again curse the ground on account of humanity, because the purpose of the heart of humanity is bad from his youth; and I will never again strike all life, as I just did."

Esau, Cain, and the Flood-Sending God. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

The Analogies

Just as non-chosen Cain was angry and spilled the blood of his chosen brother Abel, murdering him, and his blood cried out to God, so now the non-chosen Esau is angry so he cries out and wants to murder his chosen brothers.

Just as God had to console himself and speak in his heart for making a humanity whose violence created "the end" that has come up before him, so now Esau cries out and plans to console himself by murdering his treacherous brother.

The Point of the Analogies

The narrative strategy portrays Rivqah and Yitskhaq’s deceptive grab for the blessing as an act akin to Adam and Eve’s failure to trust God’s command in the garden.

Now we’ve come to the next generation. And just as Cain failed to honor God’s choice of Abel, so now Esau fails to honor God’s choice of Yaaqov (though Yaaqov hardly deserves it). This causes an outbreak of violence that leads to righteous anger and a threat to life itself.

Genesis 2 • God’s blessing of fruitful seed • Garden abundance in the midst of a desert • Sacred space of God’s presence by the tree of life on Mount Eden	Genesis 3 • Wife and husband are deceived • Violation of God’s word • Attempt to achieve the blessing in the wrong time and way	Genesis 4-9 • Sibling rivalry, angry brother murders brother, the blood cries out • Inappropriate taking of wives from the wrong lineage • The outcry comes up to God who speaks in his heart, consoles himself and decides to send the flood • So God chooses to send his chosen one away to safety, Noah	Genesis 10-11 • A journey east • A tower in the skies • Scattering of Babylon
Genesis 26 • God's blessing on Yitskhaq, abundant food and water in the midst of a famine • Yitskhaq worships Yahweh by tent and altar at Well of Seven	Genesis 27:1-29 • Deception between wife and husband • Violation of God’s word • Struggle to achieve the blessing in the wrong time and way	Genesis 27:30-28:9 • Sibling rivalry, angry brother cries out, speaks in his heart to console himself and murder his brother • Inappropriate taking of wives from the wrong lineage • The plan reaches Yaaqov’s mother who plans to send him away to safety	Genesis 28:10-22 • A journey east • A tower in the skies

Replaying the Earlier Genesis Cycle in Genesis 26-28. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Taking the Wrong Wives

⁴⁶ And Rivqah said to Yitskhaq,
“I hate **my life**, because of **the Hittite daughters** .
If Yaaqov took a wife from daughters of the Hittites like these,
from **the daughters of the land** ,
why then should **I live**?!”

28:1 And Yitskhaq called to Yaaqov,

and he **blessed** him

and he commanded him,

and he said to him,

"You will not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan .

² Arise, **go to Paddan-aram ,**

to the house of Bethuel , the father of your mother,

and **take for yourself from there a wife,**

from the daughters of Lavan , brother of your mother.

³ And El-Shadday, **may he bless you,**

and may he make your fruitful

and may he bless you

and may you become an assembly of peoples,

⁴ **and may he give to you the blessing of Abraham ,**

to you and to your **seed** with you,

so you can possess the **land** of your migrations

which Elohim has given to **Abraham .**

⁵ And Yitskhaq sent Yaaqov away,

and he went to **Paddan-aram ,**

to **Lavan ,** son of **Bethuel** the Aramean,

brother of Rivqah, mother of Yaaqov and Esau.

⁶ **And Esau saw**

that Yitskhaq had **blessed** Yaaqov,

and that he sent him to **Paddan-aram ,**

to take for himself a wife from there,

when he **blessed** him,

and that he commanded him, saying,

"You will not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan ,"

⁷ and that Yaaqov listened to his father and to his mother,

and that he went to **Paddan-aram .**

⁸ **And Esau saw**

that **the daughters of Canaan** were bad in the eyes of Yitskhaq his father,

⁹ **and Esau went** to Yishmael,

and he took Makhelath,

daughter of Yishmael ,

son of Abraham,

sister of Nebaioth,

in addition to his wives,

for himself as a wife.

The analogy with the flood narrative continues as the theme of marriage enters the picture. The shift from Esau's plan to murder Yaaqov to Rivqah's plan to send away Yaaqov seems abrupt. But the narrative sequence makes more sense once we see that we're walking through the themes of Genesis 1-9 in order.

Just as illegitimate marriages between Heaven and Earth were the third and final failure narrative in Genesis 1-9, so here the focus is on Esau's illegitimate marriages to Canaanite women that threaten the integrity of the promised lineage.

Genesis 6:1-2 Instructor's Translation

¹ And it came about, when humanity began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to/for them, ² **and the sons of Elohim saw the daughters of humanity that they were good** , **and they took wives for themselves**, whomever they chose.

Genesis 28:8-9 Instructor's Translation

⁸ **And Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan were bad** in the eyes of Yitskhaq his father, ⁹ and Esau went to Yishmael, and **he took** Makhelath, daughter of Yishmael, **for himself as a wife.**

There is also an ironic inversion of the Abraham story at this point: Rivqah, who left Mesopotamia in a great act of trust that resembled Abraham, now sends away her son to Mesopotamia because of her lack of trust in God's promise of blessing.

Abraham, Yitskhaq and Rivqah: Genesis 24	Yitskhaq, Rivqah, and Yaaqov: Genesis 28
Abraham does not want Yitskhaq to marry the Canaanites and sends his servant to Mesopotamia to his extended family Gen. 24:3-4 so I can make you swear an oath by Yahweh, the Elohim of the skies and the Elohim of the land, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites , in whose midst I am dwelling. Rather, to my land and to my family you will go , and you will take a wife for my son , for Yitskhaq."	Yitskhaq and Rivqah do not want Yaaqov to marry the Canaanites, and they send Yaaqov to Mesopotamia to their extended family Gen. 28:1-2 You will not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan . Get up, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, the father of your mother , and take for yourself from there a wife .
Abraham's servant meets Rivqah, who waters the animals, at a well	Yaaqov goes, meets Rakhel at a well, and he waters the animals
Abraham's servant meets Lavan	Yaaqov meets Lavan
Comparing Genesis 24 and 28. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

Reflection Question

Why would the biblical authors connect Esau's anger to God's own anger over the outcry before the flood?



Module 3: Jacob's Exile

SESSIONS 12-16

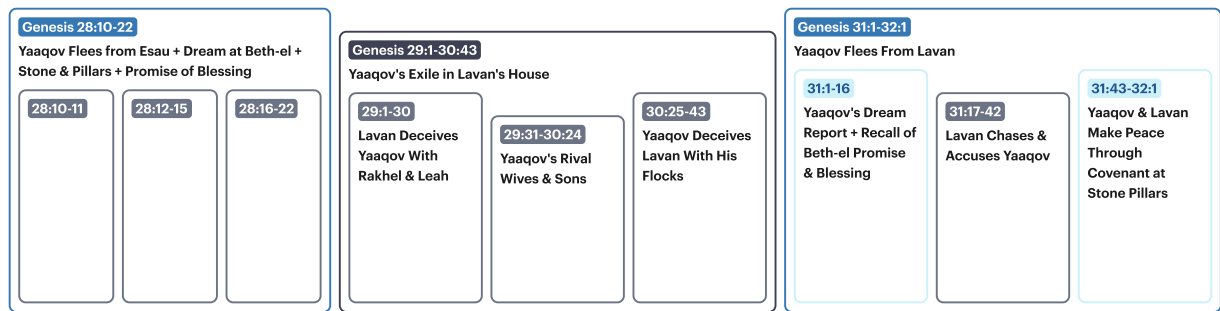
Jacob travels far away to find a wife among his mother's family. Will he learn to trust in God's promises or continue to scheme to find blessing?

Session 12: Jacob at the Gate of Heaven

Key Takeaways

- Yaaqov’s response subtly twists God’s promise of blessing and presence into a bargaining arrangement.
- Yaaqov seeing the gate of Heaven in a dream points to an awareness of heavenly realities not accessible to our conscious senses.
- Jesus envisions himself as the ramp that provides a way for Heaven and Earth to be united as one.

Yaaqov's Exile in the House of Lavan



Genesis 28:10-32:1. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

The chart above is adapted from Andrew Teeter's "Genesis Class Notes" and from the principles in his essay, ["Biblical Symmetry and Its Modern Detractors,"](#) a paper delivered at the 2019 International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament.

This section makes up the center of the Yaaqov narrative, and it recounts his 20-year exile in Kharan, the place from which his grandfather Abraham migrated to Canaan. Here, Yaaqov's deception is turned back upon him by his uncle Lavan, and what he did to his father and brother is now done to him. The deceptions and counter-deceptions escalate, and the only thing that brings this deception-fest to a halt is a covenant of peace between brothers.

The three parts of this section have an overall symmetrical design.

Genesis 28:10-22

God Appears to Yaaqov at Beth-el

- 28:12 God appears “in a dream” during the night
- 28:13 God appears as the “Elohim of Avraham and Yitskhaq, your fathers”
- “Look, I am with you”
- “I will return you to this land”
- 28:18 Yaaqov took a stone (אבן) and set up a standing-pillar (מצבה)

- **28:20** Yaaqov vows a vow (נדר) to be loyal to Yahweh

Genesis 29:1-30:43

Yaaqov's Exile in Lavan's house

Genesis 31:1-32:1

- **31:1-16** God Appears to Yaaqov in Exile
 - **31:10** God appears "in a dream"
 - "Return to the land of your fathers and your birth-family"
 - "and I will be with you"
 - "return to the land of your birth-family"
- **31:17-42** Lavan Chases after Yaaqov
- **31:43-32:1** Yaaqov and Lavan Make a Covenant of Peace
 - **31:45** Yaaqov took a stone (אבן) and set up a standing-pillar
 - **31:53** Yaaqov swears an oath (שבע) to keep his promise to Lavan
 - **31:53** Yaaqov swears by "the Elohim of Nahor, Avraham, and Yitskhaq"

Genesis 28:10-32:1. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Yaaqov Meets God at Bethel

¹⁰ And Yaaqov went out from Beer-Sheva (שבע • = "seven/oath")

and he went to Haran

¹¹ And he encountered the place,

and he stayed the night there, for the sun had gone down

and he took from the stones (אבן) of the place,

and he set his head-rest (מראשתיו)

and he laid down in that place.

¹² And he had a dream

and behold, a ramp was set (מצב) on the land,

and its head (ראש) was in the skies

and behold, messengers of Elohim were going up and going down upon it.

¹³ And behold, Yahweh stood (נצב) upon it and said,

"I myself (אני) am Yahweh the Elohim of Abraham your father and the Elohim of Yitskhaq your father;

the land that you are lying on,

to you I will give it, and to your seed.

¹⁴ And your seed will be like the dust of the land,

and you will break out to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south,

and in you all the families of **the ground** will find blessing, and in your seed.

15 **And behold**, I myself (אנכי) am with you
and I will keep you everywhere you go
and I will return you back to **this ground**,
indeed, I will not abandon you
until I do what I have spoken to you.”

16 And Yaaqov woke up from his sleep,
and he said,

“Surely **Yahweh** is in **this place** ,
and I did not know it.”

17 And Yaaqov was afraid,
and he said,

“How fearful is **this place** ,
this is none other than the **house of Elohim [= “Beth-Elohim”]** ,
and this is **the gate (שער)** of **the skies** .”

18 And Yaaqov got up **in the morning**
and he took **the stone (אבן)** which he set for **a head-rest (מראשתיו)** ,
and he set it as **a pillar (מצבה)** ,
and he poured olive oil upon **its head (ראשה)** ,
19 and he called the name of **that place** , **“Beth-El” [= “House of El”]**
Now, Luz (“Almond-tree”) was the name of the city **at its beginning (ראשנה)** .

20 And Yaaqov **vowed a vow (וידר...נדר)** , saying:

“If **Elohim** will be with me,
and keep me on this path which I am going
and if he will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear,

21 and if I return to the house of my father,
then **Yahweh** will be my **Elohim**,

22 and then **the stone (אבן)** which I placed as **a pillar (מצבה)** ,
it will be a **house of Elohim [= “Beth-Elohim”]**
and then everything which you will give me,
I will surely **tithe a tenth (עשר אעשרנו)** of it to you.”

Genesis 28:10-22. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Leaving Canaan, Leaving Eden

As Yaaqov leaves the land promised to Abraham’s seed, he encounters divine messengers coming and going between the skies and the land. He happens upon a portal, as it were, between Heaven and Earth. This is a not-very-subtle recall of the cherubim that Yahweh posted at the entrance of Eden when he exiled the humans.

Genesis 3:22-24 Instructor's Translation

²² And Yahweh Elohim said,

“Look, the human has become like one of us, knowing good and bad,
and now so that he won’t send out his hand and take also from the tree of life,
and eat and live forever ...”

²³ and Yahweh Elohim sent him out from the garden
to work the ground from which he was taken.

²⁴ **And he banished the human**

and he made to dwell at the east of the garden of Eden

cherubim and the flame of the whirling sword to guard the way to the tree of life.

The strength of this analogy is bolstered by the fact that when Yaaqov returns from his exile in Lavan’s house and crosses back into the land, he has another encounter with divine messengers.

Genesis 28:10-22

- Yaaqov meets “divine messengers” (מלאכי אלהים) at the border of the land
- “And he said, ‘This is the house of El!’”
- “And he called the name of the place, ‘House of El.’”

Genesis 29-31

- Yaaqov’s exile in Lavan’s house

Genesis 32:2-3

- Yaaqov meets “divine messengers” (מלאכי אלהים) at the border of the land
- “And he said, ‘This is the camp of Elohim’”
- “And he called the name of the place ‘Two-Camps’”

Genesis 28:10-32:3. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

There is another important parallel between the exile of Adam and Eve and Yaaqov. In the midst of a tragic departure, God promises that a future seed will restore the Eden blessing to the world.

God’s Curse on the Snake

Gen. 3:14-15 And Yahweh Elohim said to the snake,
“Because you have done this thing,
you are cursed more than every beast
and more than every living creature of the field;

God’s Blessing on the Snake-like Yaaqov

Gen. 28:13-14 ... “I am Yahweh,
the Elohim of Avraham your father,
and the Elohim of Yitskhaq your father;
the land that you are lying on,
to you I will give it, and to **your seed,**

Blessing the Snake-like Yaaqov. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

God's Curse on the Snake

on your belly you will go,
and dust you will eat,
all the days of your life.
And I will set hostility
between you and the woman,
and between your seed and **her seed**;
he will strike your head
and you will strike his heel."

God's Blessing on the Snake-like Yaaqov

and **your seed** will be like the dust of the land,
and you will break out to the west and to the east
and to the north and to the south,
and in you all the families of the land will find
blessing, and in **your seed**."

Blessing the Snake-like Yaaqov. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

However, notice the contrast. Yaaqov is likened to the deceitful snake (both are heel-strikers), but instead of receiving a curse, God gives him a blessing. Instead of a sentence of death, he is given a promise of life.

Heaven and Earth, Angels and Ultimate Reality

The imagery of Yaaqov's dream reveals a core aspect of the Bible's portrait of reality: Heaven and Earth are distinct realms, but they're not wholly separate. Rather, they are made for one another, and they intersect and overlap in ways that humans only dimly perceive. Eden is the foundational biblical image of a realm where Heaven and Earth are one. But this story takes us one step further, and it shows us how Heaven and Earth can overlap when a person's consciousness is heightened to awareness of this overlap.

The fact that Yaaqov is asleep and dreaming, and this is what makes him able to perceive Heaven's presence linked to Earth, is of greatest significance. Our normal, socialized, conscious states only make us aware of some aspects of reality.

The dream is also an Eden image, where the first "dream" is alluded to when *Elohim* causes a deep sleep to fall upon the human so that he can be divided into two (see [Gen. 2:18-25](#)).

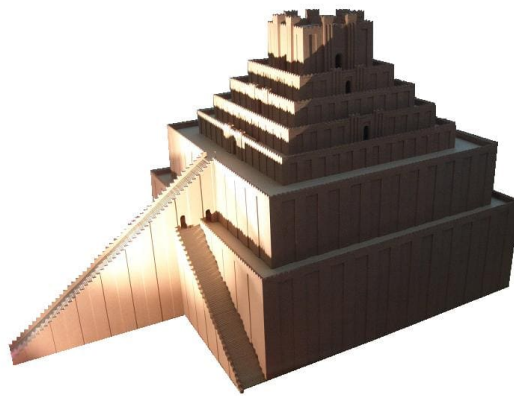
Genesis 28:12 Instructor's Translation

And he had a dream
and behold,
a ramp was set **on the land**,
and **its head** was **in the skies**
and behold,
messengers of *Elohim* were going up and going down upon it.

The Hebrew word for "ramp," or possibly "stairway," is *sullam* (סֻלָּם), and it appears only here in all of ancient Hebrew literature. It is related to the word *similtu* in Akkadian, a ancient cognate Semitic language related to Hebrew, which means "stepped ramp" and could refer to the tall, ascending stairways that lead to the top of Mesopotamian ziggurats, sacred temples that connected Heaven and Earth with an altar on top.

The great Etemenanki ziggurat in Babylon, and the accompanying Esagila temple, was one of the largest temple structures in the ancient world. It was built, remodeled, and rebuilt several times within the 700 years

between the 14th and 7th century B.C.E.



Mustafin, O. (2006) [Wikipedia Commons](#)

“Etemenanki” is Sumerian for “Tower of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth.” Its origins in the 14th century are mentioned in the famous Babylonian epic of creation *Enuma Elish*, which tells of Marduk’s rise to power as the old Babylonian empire came to dominate Mesopotamia in the 1200s B.C.E.

The point of this image is that Yaaqov is seeing the reality to which ancient temples pointed: the intersection of Heaven and Earth, of the divine and human realms in one place.

Eden, Babylon, and Bethel

Yaaqov's exile is also set on analogy to the sons of Noah who go east and attempt to build their own cosmic mountain that reaches to the skies.

Genesis 11

¹ Now the whole land was one language and one in words.

² And it came about as **they journeyed east** that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and they settled there.

³ And they said each to his neighbor, “Come, let us brick bricks and burn them as burnt.”
And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar.

⁴ And they said,
“Come, **let us build for ourselves a city**,
and **a tower whose head will be in the skies**,

Genesis 27-29

Gen. 29:1 And Yaaqov lifted his feet, and **he went to the land of the sons of the East**.

Gen. 28:17 This is none other than the house of Elohim, and **this is the gate of the skies.**

Gen. 27:18-19 ¹⁸ And Yaaqov got up in the morning,
and he took the stone which he placed for a head-space, **and he placed it as a standing-stone**, and poured olive oil upon its head, ¹⁹ and he called the name of that place Beth-El (= “House of Elohim”).

Journey East and a Tower to the Skies. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Genesis 11

and let us make for ourselves a name,
lest we be scattered upon the face of all the
land.”

...

⁹ Therefore its name was called **Babylon**, because
there Yahweh made-babble of the language of all
the land, and from there Yahweh scattered them
upon the face of all the land.

Genesis 27-29

Gen. 27:22 And then **this stone which I placed as
a standing-stone, it will be a House of Elohim** (lit.
“Beth-El”)

Journey East and a Tower to the Skies. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

There is an important contrast here between Yaaqov's experience and the Babylonian builders.

- The Babylonians are actively attempting to build their way back up to the heavens. Yaaqov is a passive recipient of the vision. His inactivity emphasizes that the connection between Heaven and Earth cannot be achieved by humans, but only received as a gift.
- The Hebrew word for Babylon is *bavel*, (בבל) which is a Hebrew spelling of the Akkadian word *bab-il*, which means “gate of the gods.” Notice that this is precisely what Yaaqov calls the stair-ramp he sees in his vision.

Within the compositional design of Genesis 1-11, the story of the building of Babylon forms a crucially important match to the story of Eden. The fact that both stories are being hyperlinked to within this story about Yaaqov shows the author's awareness of their linkage.

Genesis 1:1-2:3

- Creation out of the waters

Genesis 2:4-3:24

- Eden = cosmic mountain where heaven and earth are one
- Blessing, failure, and curse in the garden
- Exile to the east of the garden

Genesis 4-5

- Cain's violence and further exile from Eden
- **He builds a city for his own family name, and its outcry reaches up to God**

Genesis 6:1-9:17

- De-creation and re-creation by the waters

Genesis 9:18-27

- Ararat = cosmic mountain where Heaven and Earth are reconciled
- Blessing, failure, and curse in the vineyard garden
- Exile to the east of Eden

Genesis 9:28-11:9

- Ham's descendants are further exiled from Eden
- **The building of the city of Babylon for their own name, and its arrogance reaches up to God**

Genesis 25:19-34

- Creation of Yitskhaq's sons out

Genesis 26:28-9

- Canaan = A new Eden where

Genesis 28:10-22

- Yaaqov is further exiled from

Eden, Babylon, and Bethel. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

of an infertile womb	God’s blessing is realized in a time of famine • Blessing, failure, and non-blessing in the new Eden • Yaaqov exiled to the east	the new Eden • He encounters Heaven and Earth, and he builds a sacred pillar named “House of El” that will eventually become an Israelite temple
Eden, Babylon, and Bethel. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).		

The Blessing of Abraham, Yitskhaq, and Yaaqov

God’s words to Yaaqov blend together phrases from God’s blessing speeches to both Abraham and Yitskhaq.

God’s Promise to Yaaqov: Genesis 28:13-15	God’s Promises to Yitskhaq and Abraham
I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Yitskhaq;	Gen. 26:24 (God to Yitskhaq) I am the God of Abraham your father
the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your seed . Your seed will also be like the dust of the earth , and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south ;	Gen. 13:14-17 (God to Abraham) ¹⁴ Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward ; ¹⁵ for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your seed forever. ¹⁶ I will make your seed as the dust of the earth , so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your seed can also be numbered. ¹⁷ Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you .
God’s Promises to Yaaqov, Abraham, and Yitskhaq. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

God's Promise to Yaaqov: Genesis 28:13-15	God's Promises to Yitskhaq and Abraham
and all the families of the ground (משפחות האדמה) will discover blessing (ונברכו) through you (בך) and through your seed (בזרעך) .	Gen. 12:3 And all the families of the ground (משפחות האדמה) will discover blessing (ונברכו) through you (בך) Gen. 22:18 And all the nations (גוי) of the land will discover blessing (והתברכו) through your seed (בזרעך) Gen. 26:4 And all the nations (גוי) of the land will discover blessing (והתברכו) through your seed (בזרעך)
Behold, I am with you (אנכי עמך)	Gen. 26:3 I will be with you (עמך)
<i>God's Promises to Yaaqov, Abraham, and Yitskhaq. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).</i>	

Yaaqov's Two Curious Responses

Yaaqov takes God's promises and turns them into negotiating points.

Yahweh's Promise	Yaaqov's Negotiated Response
Gen. 28:13b-15 And he said, "I am Yahweh the God of Avraham your father and the God of Yitskhaq your father; the land that you are lying on, to you I will give it, and to your seed, and your seed will be like the dust of the land, and you will break out to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south and in you all the families of the land will find blessing, and in your seed. And behold, I am with you, and I will keep you everywhere you go and I will return you back to this land,	Gen. 28:20-22 And Yaaqov vowed a vow, saying: " If God will be with me, and if he will keep me on this path which I am going, and if he will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, and if I return to the house of my father, then Yahweh will be my God . And then this stone which I placed as a pillar, it will be a house of God, and then everything which you will give me, I will surely offer a tenth of it to you."

Yaaqov's Two Curious Responses. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Yahweh's Promise	Yaaqov's Negotiated Response
and I will not abandon you until I do what I have spoken to you."	
Yaaqov's Two Curious Responses. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

Yaaqov takes God's promise of protection and blessing and turns it into a transactional obligation on God's part.

Yahweh offers to give the blessing of Yaaqov's ancestors to him as a gift, but Yaaqov turns it into a condition: Yahweh can be his God if he protects him.

Notice that Yaaqov reduces the cosmic scope of the divine promises down to the confines of his own personal survival ("food and clothing") and return to the land. God's promise to Yaaqov is about his seed, the land, fruitfulness, and blessing for the nations. Yaaqov's response only repeats what is important for his personal survival (note that "food and clothing" is exactly what Yaaqov used to deceive his brother and father).

"Jacob the trickster is now bound to this God who presides over all the trickery yet to come in the narrative. God has been committed to Jacob since the oracle of [25:23](#). But only now is Jacob also bound. Jacob's response strikes one as a genuine act of faith. But Jacob will be Jacob. Even in this solemn moment, he still sounds like a bargain-hunter. He still adds an 'if' ([v. 20](#))."

Brueggemann, Walter (1982). [Genesis: Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching](#). Westminster John Knox Press. 248.

After negotiating with God's promise, Yaaqov goes on to promise to build God a temple—something that God has not asked for. This is similar to David's offer to build a temple for God when God never asked for such a thing.

2 Samuel 7:1-7 NASB

¹ Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the LORD had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, ² that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains." ³ Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your mind, for the LORD is with you."

⁴ But in the same night, the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying, ⁵ "Go and say to my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD, "**Are you the one who should build me a house to dwell in?**" ⁶ For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle. ⁷ Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, **did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel,** which I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, '**Why have you not built me a house of cedar?**'"'"

[Genesis 28:10-22](#) is the founding story of the temple at Bethel, which will later become an idolatrous center of worship for the estranged tribes of Israel and eventually lead to Israel's destruction and exile.

1 Kings 12:28-32 NASB

²⁸ So the king consulted, and made **two golden calves**, and he said to them, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt.”

²⁹ **He set one in Bethel**, and the other he put in Dan.

³⁰ Now **this thing became a sin**, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan.

³¹ And he made houses on high places, and made priests from among all the people who were not of the sons of Levi. ³² Jeroboam instituted a feast in the eighth month on the fifteenth day of the month, like the feast which is in Judah, and he went up to the altar; **thus he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves which he had made.** And **he stationed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made.**

Amos 3:14 NASB

For on the day that I punish Israel’s transgressions, **I will also punish the altars of Bethel;** the horns of the altar will be cut off and they will fall to the ground.

Amos 4:4-5 NIV

⁴ “**Go to Bethel and sin;** go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years. ⁵ Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings—boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do,” declares the Sovereign LORD.

Amos 5:5-6 NASB

⁵ But do not resort to Bethel and do not come to Gilgal, nor cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal will certainly go into captivity **and Bethel will come to trouble.**

⁶ Seek the LORD that you may live,
or he will break forth like a fire,
O house of Joseph,
and **it will consume with none to quench it for Bethel,**

Bethel, the Son of Man, and Jesus

This story is alluded to in an important moment in the Gospel of John, where Jesus is assembling a symbolic restored Israel.

John 1:44-51 NASB

⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said of him, “Behold, **an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!**”

⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, **when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.**”

⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”

⁵⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, “Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.”

⁵¹ And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.**”

John here retells the story of Nathanael’s calling into the group of Jesus’ disciples. However, he has told the story in order to portray Jesus as Yahweh, summoning a morally transformed (= new covenant) Yaaqov/Israel to follow him.

Nathanael is presented as a renewed Israel, being summoned as a new Adam (from “under the tree”) to follow Jesus into a new Eden (= a renewed and united Heaven and Earth).

The hyperlinks that John is activating show how the Yaaqov story was understood in relationship to the larger themes about Yaaqov at work in the TaNaK.

Jesus and Nathanael	Yaaqov and the Prophets
John 1:47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit !”	Gen. 27:35 But Yitskhaq said to Esau, “Your brother Jacob (Heb. yaaqov = “deceiver”) came with deceit (Heb. mirmah) and he has taken away your blessing.” Zeph. 3:12-13, 15 But I will leave among you a humble and lowly people, and they will take refuge in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel will do no wrong and tell no lies , nor will a tongue of deceit (Heb. tarmit) be found in their mouths; for they will feed and lie down with no one to make them afraid . The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst ; you will fear disaster no more.
John 1:48-49 Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree , I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel .”	Mic. 4:4 But they will sit, each man under his own vine and under his own fig tree , and no one will make them afraid Zech. 3:8-10 “For behold, I am going to bring my servant, Branch ... and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day,” declares the Lord of hosts, “every one of you will invite his neighbor

Hyperlinks to the Jacob Story. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Jesus and Nathanael

Yaaqov and the Prophets

to **under his vine and under his fig tree**."

1 Kgs. 4:21, 25 Now **Solomon** ruled over all the kingdoms ... So Judah and Israel lived in safety, **every man under his vine and his fig tree**

Hyperlinks to the Jacob Story. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Reflection Question

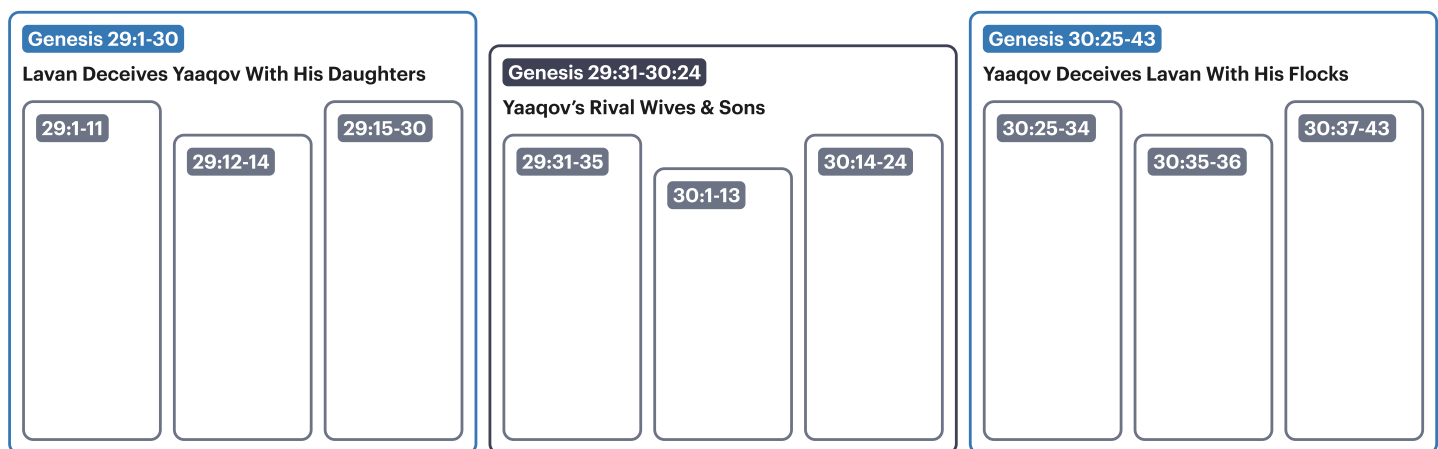
How is Yaaqov's vow to build God a house a parody of the vision God gave him?

Session 13: Deception in the House of Lavan

Key Takeaways

- Lavan's deception with his daughters is paralleled by his deception with his flocks, providing an implicit critique of the way these men are using women as objects in their power games.
- How we interpret passages depicting the mistreatment of women in the Bible can either illuminate God's Eden ideal for humanity or it can short-circuit the potential of millions of God's image bearers.
- When Yaaqov meets Rakhel, he once again moves forward with his own plan to seize blessing for himself.

Yaaqov's Exile in the House of Lavan



Genesis 29:1-30:43. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

At the very center of the center of the Yaaqov story stands Genesis 29:1-30:43, the narrative of Yaaqov's exile and slavery to his uncle Lavan in Mesopotamia. This large block of narrative has been carefully designed in a nested series of symmetrical patterns. Each paired relationship invites us to meditate on the similarities and differences of the comparison in order to see the deeper message of Yaaqov's exile.

Genesis 29:1-30

Rival Brothers: Yaaqov Is Deceived by Lavan With His Daughters (Named "Lamb" and "Calf")

- **29:1-11** Yaaqov meets secondborn Rakhel (= "Lamb") by a well
 - **29:12-14** Lavan receives Yaaqov into his family
- **29:15-30** Lavan deceives Yaaqov with firstborn Leah (= "Calf")

Genesis 29:31-30:24

Rival Sisters: Rakhel and Leah Struggle

- 29:31-35 Firstborn unloved Leah births four sons
- 30:1-13 Secondborn loved Rakhel schemes to birth two sons
- 30:14-24 Firstborn unloved Leah usurps Rakhel to birth two more sons

Genesis 30:25-43

Rival Brothers: Yaaqov Counter-Deceives Lavan With His Flocks

- 30:25-34 Yaaqov proposes to care for Lavan's flocks
- 30:35-36 Lavan's scheme to deceive Yaaqov again
- 30:37-43 Yaaqov's counter-scheme to deceive Lavan with his flocks

Genesis 29:1-30:43. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Remember, we're already within a larger story about two rival brothers, Yaaqov and Esau, and Yaaqov is on the run into exile because he deceived his older brother. In the Lavan story, this sibling rivalry motif is expanded and explored in multiple ways.

In the outer stories ([Gen. 29:1-30](#) and [Gen. 30:25-43](#)), Lavan and Yaaqov keep deceiving and counter-deceiving each other in ways that strangely mirror what Yaaqov did to his brother and father. Notice also that the first story of deception focuses on Lavan's daughters, who are named after domesticated animals ("Lamb" and "Calf") and then, in the matching third story, Yaaqov counter-deceives Lavan with actual domesticated animals.

In the central story ([Gen. 29:31-30:24](#)), the rivalries of Yaaqov and Esau and of Yaaqov and Lavan are mirrored in the story of the two rival sisters, Rakhel and Leah. They also try to bargain and trick each other to receive a greater share of the blessing of abundance and fertility, just as Yaaqov did to both Esau and Lavan.

In all of these stories, human characters scheme to achieve the Eden-blessing of God's abundance, and they hurt each other in the process. And yet, God meets each of these people, the deceivers and the deceived, exactly where they're at and shows them patience and mercy. However, at the same time, the overarching theme in the Yaaqov story is that God's providence is at work, and even the selfish schemes of Lavan become the vehicle of God's purpose in Yaaqov's life. What Yaaqov did to his family is brought back upon his head, but in order to humble him and make him into the kind of person who can become the vehicle of God's blessing to others.

Yaaqov Meets Rakhel at the Well

- ¹ And Yaaqov lifted up his feet,
and he went to the land of the sons of the East,
² and he saw, and look: a well in the field,
and look: there were three herds of flocks laying down by it,
because from that well they provided water for the herds,

and **the stone** over **the mouth of the well** **was big**,
3 and all the **herds** would **be gathered** there,
and they would **roll away** **the stone** from **the mouth of the well**,
and **they would provide water** for the **flock**,
and they would **return** **the stone** over **the mouth of the well** to **its place**.

Dialogue

4 **And Yaaqov said** to them,
“**My brothers!** Where are y’all from?”

And they said,

“We are from Kharan.”

5 **And he said** to them,

“Do y’all know **Lavan, son of Nakhor?**”

And they said,

“We do know.”

6 **And he said** to them,

“Is there shalom for him?”

And they said,

“Shalom.”

Rachel

And look: Rakhel [= “Lamb”] his daughter was coming with the flock.

7 **And he said,**

Dialogue

“Look, the day **is still big**,
it isn’t time for the **livestock** **to be gathered**,
provide water for the **flock**, and go, graze.”

8 **And they said,**

“We are not able, until all the herds **are gathered**,
then they **roll away** **the stone** from **the mouth of the well**,
and then we **provide water** for the flock.”

Rachel

9 And while he was still speaking with them,

then Rakhel came with the flock that belonged to her father,
because she was a shepherd.

10 And it came about **when Yaaqov saw** **Rakhel**, daughter of **Lavan, brother of his mother**, and the **flock** of **Lavan, brother of his mother**, then he came near, and **he rolled away** **the stone** over **the mouth of the well**, and **he provided water for** the **flock** of **Lavan, brother of his mother**,
 11 and Yaaqov **provided water for** **Rakhel**, **and he lifted up his voice**, and he wept.

Genesis 29:1-11. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

An Eden Well in the East

After Yaaqov is exiled from the new Eden of Canaan, he finds himself among the “sons of the east.” This recalls all the “eastward” journeys into exile since the garden of Eden.

Eden	Gen. 2:8 The Lord God planted a garden toward the east , in Eden; and there he placed the man whom he had formed.
Exile From the Garden	Gen. 3:24 So he drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden he stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.
Exile From Eden	Gen. 4:16 Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden .
Babylon	Gen. 11:2 It came about as they journeyed east , that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.
Sodom	Gen. 13:11-12 So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed east . Thus they separated from each other. Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom.
East of the Jordan	Gen. 25:5-6 Now Abraham gave all that he had to Yitskhaq; but to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts while he was still living, and sent them away from his son Yitskhaq eastward , to the land of the east.

East of Eden. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

But, just as in “Eden of the east” God provides a life-giving spring (see [Gen. 2:6, 10-14](#)), Yaaqov happens upon a well with a great stone over its mouth. This is an important narrative image that recalls the divine provision of water in the wilderness in the Eden story.

Wives, Brothers and Mothers, Bone and Flesh

Recall how the story about the provision of water in Eden ([Gen. 2:4-17](#)) was compositionally paired with the multiplication of the one human into many through the provision of a wife ([Gen. 2:18-25](#)). This symbolic pairing of “water/wife” from the Eden story has been redeployed already in Genesis in the story of Hagar and Ishmael ([Genesis 16](#) and [21](#)). Here it is drawn upon again.

Yaaqov in Genesis 28-29	The Human in Genesis 2
Gen. 28:10-22 Yaaqov falls asleep alone, and his future multiplied family is revealed to him	Gen. 2:21 The human falls asleep alone and is split into two
Gen. 28:14 Yaaqov is told his future seed will be “like the dust of the land”	Gen. 2:7 The human was made of the “dust of the ground”
Gen. 29:1, 10 God provides a well in the eastern desert, from which Yaaqov “provides water” (שקה) for the flock	Gen. 2:6, 10-14 God provides waters in the wilderness that “provides water” (שקה) to Eden
Gen. 29:10-11 Yaaqov meets his future wife at the well	Gen. 2:23 The man wakes up in Eden (by the river) and sees his new wife
Gen. 29:14 “Truly you are my bone and my flesh!”	Gen. 2:23 “This is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh!”
Gen. 29 Yaaqov has left his father and mother and becomes joined to his wife	Gen. 2:24 “For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and join himself to his wife”
Yaaqov and Genesis 2. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

The point of the analogy: Just like Yaaqov has been exiled from his home because of the “flood” of Esau’s anger, God graciously provides a new Eden and a new partner for his chosen one as an act of generous mercy. This entire story is set on analogy with God’s appointment of a human after bringing up the dry land from among the waters ([Gen. 1:1-2:3](#)) and then providing a garden home in the wilderness for his chosen representatives to flourish ([Gen. 2:4-25](#)). Yaaqov and Rakhel are depicted as a new Adam and Eve, but we already know from the previous section Yaaqov is not innocent.

The Way We Do Things in Kharan

In [Genesis 29:2-3](#), the narrative focuses on the procedures used by the shepherds for watering the flock and on the timing of watering from the well. The opening scene described the normal day at the well: Herds gather > roll away stone > water animals > return stone to its place.

Yaaqov barges onto the scene, and in [Gen. 29:7](#), he starts telling them how to do their job! “It’s not time to gather in the flocks yet. Provide water for them and send the flocks back out!”

In Genesis 29:8, the shepherds give a curt reply. “We’re not able (לא נוכל) until all the flocks are gathered. That’s when we roll away the stone and water the animals.” It’s a semi-kind way of telling Yaaqov, “That’s not how we do things around here.”

The narrative immediately goes on in Genesis 29:9-11 to show how Yaaqov bulldozes right over their cultural custom. The moment he sees Rakhel, he runs down and does the very thing the shepherds said they don’t do! He rolls away the stone and he waters the flock of Lavan. This entire exchange and the focus on the well seems very purposeful on the narrator’s part.

- When God provided water in the desert for Eden, and when God provided water for Hagar and Ishmael, the water came by surprise and at the last minute, when we thought there was no way forward.
- In this narrative, God has provided a well and a future wife for Yaaqov. But Yaaqov, eager to seize on an opportunity, goes ahead and provides water by himself, on his own timeline, even violating the cultural custom of the east.
- And remember: Yaaqov provides water for Lamb (= Rakhel) and for Lavan’s flock. This is a meaningful portrait of Yaaqov as a brash schemer working from his own agenda regarding Rakhel. This theme will come up again.

The whole emphasis at work in Genesis 29:1-11 may seem random, but it will become very meaningful when we turn to the matching panel of the story in Genesis 29:15-30, where we learn that Yaaqov's brashness was very much noticed by “the men of that place” (Gen. 29:22) and not appreciated at all!

Reflection Question

What are some ways the text signals its critique of the mistreatment of women?

Session 14: Laban Deceives Jacob

Key Takeaways

- Human favoritism is a distorted version of God's love and favor for the chosen one, which is bestowed for the blessing of the many.
- Yaaqov, with his four wives, is the furthest yet from the Eden ideal for marriage.
- God institutes laws protecting the firstborn's rights against favoritism, but God also loves to topple hierarchies to elevate the unloved and non-chosen.

Lavan the Deceiver, Rakhel and Leah the Trees

¹² And Yaaqov **told** **Rakhel** that he was **the brother of her father**, and that he was **the son of Rebekah**, then she **ran** and **told** her father.

¹³ And it came about when Lavan **heard** the **report** of Yaaqov, **son of his sister**, then he **ran** to meet him, and he embraced him, and he kissed him, and he brought him into his house, and he **reported** to Lavan all of these words.

¹⁴ And Lavan said to him, "Truly, **you are my bone and my flesh**!" And he dwelt with him **a month of days** (חדש ימים).

Genesis 29:12-14. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Lavan's Proposal

¹⁵ And Lavan said to Yaaqov,
A "Are you really **my brother**,
yet you serve me for nothing?
Tell me, what is your wage?"

Lavan's Daughters

B 16 Now, Lavan had two daughters,
the name of **the big one** was **Leah** [= "Cow"],
and the name of **the small one** was **Rakhel** [= "Lamb"].
17 Now, **the eyes** of **Leah** were **tender** ,
and **Rakhel** was **beautiful of form**
and **beautiful of sight** .

Proposal Implemented

18 And Yaaqov **loved Rakhel** ,
and he said,
"I will **serve** you **seven years** for **Rakhel** , your **smaller** daughter,
19 And Lavan said,
A' "It is more **good** that I **give** her to you,
than **giving** her to another man.
Dwell with me!"
20 And Yaaqov **served** for **Rakhel** for **seven years** ,
and they were **in his eyes** like **a few days** (ימים אחדים),
because of his **love** for her.

Lavan Gives the Wrong Daughter + a Slave

21 And Yaaqov said to Lavan,
" **Give** me my wife,
because **my days** are **fulfilled** ,
so I can go into her ."
22 And Lavan gathered all the men of **the place** ,
A and he made a drinking-feast,
23 **and it came about in the evening** ,
then he **took Leah** his daughter,
and he brought her to him,
and he went into her .
24 And Lavan **gave** Zilpah his female slave to **Leah** his daughter as a female slave.

Lavan's Deception Exposed

25 **And it came about in the morning** ,
and look: She was **Leah** !
And he said to Lavan,
" **What is this you have done to me** ?!
Didn't I **serve** you for **Rakhel** ?
So **why did you deceive me** ?!"

26 And Lavan said,
 “This is not how it’s done in **our place** ,
 to give **the little one** before the **firstborn** .
 27 **Fulfill this seven** ,
 then I will **give** to you also this one for the **service** ,
 which you will **serve** with me still **another seven years** .”

Lavan Gives the Right Daughter + a Slave

28 And Yaaqov did this,
 and he **fulfilled this seven** ,
 and he **gave** to him **Rakhel** his daughter for him as a wife.
 29 And Lavan **gave** to **Rakhel** his daughter Bilhah his female slave as her female slave.
 30 And he also went into **Rakhel** ,
 and he also **loved Rakhel** more than **Leah** ,
 and he **served** him still **another seven years** .

Genesis 29:15-30. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Following the scenes in Genesis 28:10-22 and Genesis 29:1-14, which both mapped onto the creation of Eden story and the provision of a partner for the lonely human, we now hear the next notes of the melody: the deception, a test, and the failure. This entire story is mapped onto the narrative pattern of Genesis 3.

Lavan's Deception in the East	The Snake's Deception in Eden of the East
Gen. 29:16-19 Two daughters in Lavan's family • Leah's eyes are "tender" (<i>rak</i> /רַך) • Rakhel is "beautiful of sight/form" (<i>יפה מראה</i> / תאר) • "It is more good (<i>טוב</i>) that I give her to you ..."	Gen. 3:6-7 Two trees in the garden • The forbidden tree is about knowing good (<i>טוב</i>) and bad (<i>רע</i> / <i>ra'</i>) • The forbidden tree is "good of sight and desirable to the eyes" (<i>טוב מראה</i> / <i>לעינים</i>)
Gen. 29:23 Lavan deceptively "takes" (<i>לקח</i>) the older daughter and "gives" (<i>נתן</i>) her to Yaaqov.	Gen. 3:6 The woman "took" (<i>לקח</i>) the fruit from the tree and she ate, then she "gave" (<i>נתן</i>) to her husband and he ate.
Gen. 29:25 After realizing the deception, Yaaqov says, "What is this you have done to me?!" (<i>מה זאת עשית לי</i>)	Gen. 3:13 After the humans are deceived and disobey God's command, God says, "What is this you have done?" (<i>מה זאת עשית</i>)
Gen. 29:26-30 Lavan's deception results in "service/slavery" (<i>עבד</i>) to Lavan for 2x7 years.	Gen. 3:23 The deception results in "slavery" (<i>עבד</i>) to the ground until death.
<i>Lavan the Snake</i> . Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

Also important is how the three stories of Abraham and Yitskhaq putting their wives at risk are being drawn upon for the analogy between the daughters and the trees.

Genesis 2-3	Genesis 12	Genesis 20
Gen. 3:6 And the woman (האשה) saw (ראה) that good (טוב) was the tree for eating, and desirable to the eyes ... and she took (לקח) ...	Gen. 12:11-12 I know (ידע) that a woman (אשה) beautiful of sight (מראה) you are ... and they will see you (ראה) ... and kill me and let you live (הוה)	Gen. 20:2 Abraham said of Sarah, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took (לקח) Sarah.
Gen. 2:17 From the tree of knowing good and bad you must not eat, because in the day you eat from it, you will certainly die (מות תמות).		Gen. 20:3 Look, you are dead (מת), on account of the woman whom you took . Gen. 20:7 ... and if you don't return her, do that you will certainly die (מות תמות) ...
Gen. 3:3 From the tree that is in the middle of the garden we cannot eat from it or touch it (נגע)	Gen. 12:17 And Yahweh touched/struck (נגע) Pharaoh with touches/strikes (נגעים)	Gen. 20:6 God said to him ... "I did not allow you to touch/strike (נגע)"
Gen. 3:9 And Yahweh called out to (ויקרא) the man ... Gen. 3:13 And Yahweh said to the woman, " What is this you have done (מה זאת עשית)?"	Gen. 12:18 And Pharaoh called out to (ויקרא) Abram and said, " What is this you have done (מה זאת עשית) to me? You didn't tell (נגד) me that she was your wife."	Gen. 20:9 Abimelech called out to (ויקרא) Abraham and said, " What have you done to us (מה עשית לנו)?"
Gen. 2:16 And Yahweh commanded (ויצו) the human ... Gen. 3:23 And Yahweh sent	Gen. 12:20 And Pharaoh commanded (ויצו) ... and sent him away (שלח).	Gen. 20:15 And Abimelech said, "Behold, my land is before you, dwell (ישב) in the good in your eyes (טוב בעיניך)."
<i>Wives at Risk.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).		

Genesis 2-3	Genesis 12	Genesis 20
away (שלח) the human from the garden of Eden.		
Gen. 3:5 ... in the day that you eat from it your eyes (עיניכם) will be opened ...		Gen. 20:16 One thousand silver pieces ... let it be as a covering of the eyes (כסות עינים) for you.
Wives at Risk. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).		

In all of these stories, a snake-like deceiver takes what God has given as a blessing (trees/a wife), and twists it into a violation of God’s command and promise.

- In Genesis 3, the snake deceived a husband and wife about a forbidden tree.
- In Genesis 12, 20, and 26, the husband acts like a deceitful snake about a forbidden wife.
- In Genesis 29, the father acts like a deceitful snake about his daughters and uses them to co-opt for himself the blessing of God’s chosen one.

That’s Not How We Do Things Around Here

Recall Yaaqov’s long conversations with the shepherds in Genesis 29:4-8 and the seemingly random focus on the eastern shepherds’ normal custom of waiting to water their sheep until all the flocks are gathered (Gen. 29:1-3) and not before (as they say to Yaaqov in Gen. 29:7-8). There is a significant effort made by the author to recall those themes here in this panel about Lavan’s deception and Yaaqov’s marriage to his daughters.

Genesis 29:1-11

- **29:3-6** The shepherds who know Lavan gather by the well with the “stone ... **in its (מקום) place.**”
- **29:3, 8** They **gather (אסף) all the flocks** by the well and then can provide **drinking water (שקה)** to the flocks.
- **29:10-11** Yaaqov barges ahead to water the flock (וישק) and to kiss (וישק) **Rakhel**.
- **29:8** **“We are not able [to water the flock] until all the herds are gathered.** That’s when we water the flock.”

Genesis 29:12-14

- “And Rakhel ran and reported this to her father”
- “And Yaaqov reported all these things to Lavan”

Genesis 29:15-30

- **29:22** The men who come to Yaaqov’s wedding are called “**the men of the place (מקום)**”.
- **29:22** “Lavan **gathered (אסף) the men** of the place and he made a **drinking feast (משתה)** for them.”
- **29:18** Yaaqov assumes he can ask to marry **Rakhel**, the younger daughter, before Leah, the older daughter
- **29:25-26** Yaaqov: “Why did you deceive me?!”
Lavan: “**That’s not how things are done in our place (מקום),** to give the little one before the firstborn.”

Genesis 29:1-30. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

These repetitions use deliberate strategy to compare Yaaqov’s brash behavior with Rakhel and the flocks with his equally brash request to marry the younger daughter before the older.

The role of the shepherds and the men of the place are exactly parallel: both are present at the two “drinking” sources in the story (a well and a drinking party).

And Lavan and the shepherds play the same role: to inform Yaaqov that “That’s now how we do things around here in Kharan!”

Yaaqov's role as the trickster and manipulator in his own family may have brought him success up to a point, but now that he’s swimming in a bigger pond, he finds that his old tricks don’t work so well anymore.

Deceptions Within Deceptions: “The One Who Digs a Pit Falls Into It ...”

The narrative of Yaaqov in exile has been designed as an elaborate exploration of the theme in Proverbs about how the schemes of the wicked always come back upon them.

Proverbs 26:24-27 Instructor's Translation

²⁴ Whoever **hates,** he **disguises himself** with his lips,
and harbors **deception** **in his heart;**

²⁵ when he speaks with generous grace,
do not believe him,
for seven abominations **in his heart;**

²⁶ although his **hatred** is covered with **trickery,**
his evil will be exposed in the assembly.

²⁷ Whoever digs a pit will fall into it,
and **whoever rolls a stone, it will turn back onto him.**

This proverb is a classic statement of the biblical “eye for eye” model of recompense: Whatever you’ve done to others will eventually make its way back to you. Notice how in this first story of Lavan’s deception, he does to Yaaqov exactly what Yaaqov did to his family members.

Lavan’s deception contains the main features of Yaaqov and Rivqah’s deception.

- Rakhel is the younger sibling, favored by Yaaqov // Yaaqov is the younger sibling, loved by Rivqah and chosen by God
- Leah is the older sibling, unloved by Yaaqov // Esau is the older sibling, loved by Yitskhaq, non-chosen by God
- Yaaqov deceives Esau to get the “firstborn right” // Lavan deceives Yaaqov with his firstborn daughter
- Yaaqov's deception earned him the blessing // Lavan’s deception inverts the blessing into slavery
- Lavan's deception also uses key words and themes from the Yaaqov story: disguising oneself, deception, trickery, seven, and rolling a stone.

Reflection Question

How is Lavan’s deception at Yaaqov’s wedding a distorted version of Eden blessing and a reversal of Yaaqov’s own deceptions?

Session 15: God Sees Leah

Key Takeaways

- The combined language of “love” and “hate” makes its first appearance here talking about Rakhel and Leah, but it gets picked up by later biblical authors to talk about outcomes for entire groups of people.
- Levi and Judah, the third and fourth sons of the unloved wife, become the fathers of the future anointed leaders of Israel.
- Time and time again, God reveals his heart by elevating the poor and oppressed and treating them as kings and queens.

Yaaqov's Rival Wives and Many Sons

Genesis 29:31-35

- **Yahweh sees** the unloved Leah and gives her 4 sons

Genesis 30:1-16

- **30:1-8 Rival Sisters / Failure: Round 1**
 - Rakhel is jealous of Leah and gives her slave to Yaaqov > 2 sons
- **30:9-13 Rival Sisters / Failure: Round 2**
 - Leah is jealous of Rakhel and gives her slave to Yaaqov > 2 sons
- **30:14-16 Rival Sisters / Failure: Round 3**
 - Rakhel hires out Yaaqov for a night in exchange for mandrakes

Genesis 30:17-24

- **30:17-21 Yahweh hears** the unloved Leah and gives her 2 sons + 1 daughter
- **30:22-24 Yahweh remembers and hears** younger Rakhel and gives her 1 son

Genesis 29:31-30:24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

The birth narrative of the many sons of Yaaqov is set within the rivalry of Leah and Rakhel, whose sins against each other mirror that rivalry of Yaaqov and Esau.

The narrative opens and closes with God noticing the despondent state of each sister (“and God saw ...” and “God remembered ... and listened ...”), followed by the surprise pregnancy and birth of children (Leah’s first four and Rakhel’s one).

Inside of this “divine gift” frame, there are three failure narratives of the sisters scheming to generate their own blessing, each one patterned after earlier narratives about Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, or about Yaaqov and Esau.

- Genesis 30:1-7 portrays Rakhel as jealous of her fertile sister, and so she replays the sin of Abraham and Sarah against Hagar. But God responds with the blessing of children.
- Genesis 30:9-13 portrays Leah as imitating her sister in repeating the sins of Abraham and Sarah against Hagar, and again the divine response is the blessing of more children.
- Genesis 30:14-21 combines the rival sisters in a single narrative, so that the discovery of the mandrakes (a cipher for "Edom") becomes the occasion for Leah (the older) to "buy" the blessing of children from her sister Rakhel. In this story, Leah becomes Yaaqov, while Rakhel becomes Esau, trading away her husband for mandrakes.

Yahweh Blesses the Non-Chosen

³¹ And Yahweh saw that Leah was **hated** ,
and he opened her womb ,
but Rakhel was barren.

Leah's 4 Sons

#1 Reuben

³² **And Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son,**
and she called his name Reuben , (ראובן)
for she said,
“ **Because Yahweh has seen** (ראה) my oppression,
for now my husband will **love** me.”

#2 Shimon

³³ **And Leah became pregnant again and gave birth to a son,**
and she said,
“ **Because Yahweh has heard** (שמע) that I was **hated** ,
and he has also given me this one,”
and she called his name Shimon . (שמעון)

#3 Levi

³⁴ **And she became pregnant again and gave birth to a son,**
and she said,
“Now, **this time** my husband will be **attached** (ילוה) to me,
because I have borne him three sons.”
Therefore his name was called Levi . (לוי)

#4 Yehudah

35 **And she got pregnant again and gave birth to a son,**
and she said,

“ **This time** I will **praise** (אודה) Yahweh.”

Therefore she called his name Yehudah . (יהודה)

And she stopped giving birth .

Genesis 29:31-35. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

In this opening scene, Leah is set on analogy with Hagar, the non-chosen wife of Abraham who is still blessed and given a promise of future seed.

Genesis 16:11-13 NASB*

¹¹ And the messenger of Yahweh said to [Hagar], “Look, you are pregnant and will give birth to a son, and you will call his name **Yishmael (= “El will hear”)** because **Yahweh has heard your oppression**.

¹² And as for him, he will be a donkey of a human. His hand will be against everyone, and everyone’s hand will be against him. And against the face of all his brothers he will reside.” ¹³ And she called the name of Yahweh who spoke to her, “You are **El-Roi (= “El Who Sees Me”)**”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 21:17-18 NASB

¹⁷ And *Elohim* heard the voice of the young one, and the messenger of *Elohim* called to Hagar from the skies, and he said to her,

“What is it, Hagar? Don’t be afraid, because **Elohim has heard** the voice of the young one, in the place where he is.

¹⁸ Get up, pick up the young one, and take him with your hand, because I will make him a nation, a great one.”

In the story of Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael are the non-chosen, but they are favored by Abraham. Their expulsion is a result of Sarah’s jealousy (Gen. 21), so God cares for the non-chosen and also gives Eden blessing to them.

Here in the Yaaqov story, Leah is unloved, so God also blesses her with abundant seed.

The Ancestors of the Messiahs

This story is remarkable as it makes up the center of the center of the Yaaqov story, and it features the birth of the two sons who will become the ancestors of Israel’s two “anointed” institutions: the priesthood and the kingship.

- Levi is the ancestor of Aaron (see Exod. 6:12-28), who will be Israel’s first “anointed” high priest (see Exod. 29:7; Lev. 8:12).
- Judah is the ancestor of David, who will be Israel’s first king to unite the tribes into one people (see 1 Sam. 16, 2 Sam. 4-5).

Rakhel's Scheme to Build a Family

Rakhel's 2 Sons Through Her Slave

¹ **And Rakhel saw that she had not given birth** for Yaaqov,
and she became jealous of her sister;
and she said to Yaaqov,
“Give me sons!
And if not,
I’m going to die!”

² And Yaaqov's anger was hot against Rakhel,
and he said,
“Am I in the place of Elohim,
who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?”

³ **And she said,**
“Here is my servant Bilhah.
Go in to her,
so she can give birth onto my knees,
and from her I also will be built up.”

⁴ **And she gave to him her servant Bilhah as a wife**,
and Yaaqov went in to her.

#5 Dan

⁵ **And Bilhah conceived and birthed for Yaaqov a son,**

⁶ **and Rakhel said,**
“God has **vindicated** me (דנני),
and also has heard my voice,
and has given me a son.”

Therefore she called his name Dan (דן).

#6 Naphtali

⁷ And **Rakhel's servant Bilhah** conceived again and **birthed for Yaaqov a second son**.

⁸ **And Rakhel said,**
“ **Wrestlings** (נפתולי) of Elohim
I have **wrestled** (נפתלתי) with my sister,
and I have prevailed!”

And she called his name Naphtali (נפתלי).

Leah's 2 Sons Through Her Slave

9 **And Leah saw that she had stopped giving birth** ,
and she took **her servant Zilpah** ,
and she gave her to Yaaqov as a wife .

#7 Gad

10 **And Leah's servant Zilpah birthed for Yaaqov a son**,
11 **and Leah said**,
"By **Fortune** (בגד)!"
and she called his name **Gad** (גד).

#8 Asher

12 And **Leah's servant Zilpah birthed for Yaaqov a second son** ,
13 **and Leah said**,
"By my **blessing** (באשר)!"
For women will call me **blessed** (אשרוני)."
And she called his name **Asher** (אשר).

Genesis 30:1-13. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Sarah didn't trust in Yahweh to provide her with a child. Rakhel is also unable to have children and comes up with the same scheme as Sarah.

Genesis 3:6 Instructor's Translation

And the woman (האשה) saw (ותרא) that the tree was good for eating ... and she took (ותקה) from its fruit and she ate and she gave (ותתן) also to her husband (אישה) with her and he ate.

Sarah and Hagar	Rakhel and Bilhah
Gen. 16:1 And Sarai ... had not given birth for Abram	Gen. 30:1 And Rachel saw (ותרא) that she had not given birth for Jacob and she was jealous of her sister
Gen. 16:2 And Sarai said... "Behold (הנה), Yahweh has bound me from giving birth. Please go into my slave (שפחה). Perhaps I can be built up from her (בנה + מן)." And Abram listened to her voice (שמע + לקול).	Gen. 30:2 And Jacob said, "Am I in the place of God who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" Gen. 30:3 "Behold (הנה), my maid-slave (אמתי) Bilhah, go into her and she will give birth upon my knees, and I will be built up, me too, from her (בנה + מן)"
Replaying Genesis 16. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

Sarah and Hagar	Rakhel and Bilhah
Gen. 16:3-4 And Sarai took ... her slave (שפחה), and she gave her to (ותתן ל) Abram as a wife (לאשה). And he went into her ...	Gen. 30:4 And she gave to him (ותתן לו) Bilhah her slave (שפחה) as a wife (לאשה) and he went into her.
Gen. 16:4 And [Hagar] became pregnant and when she saw (ותרא) she was pregnant, her mistress was cursed in her eyes.	Gen. 30:5 And [Bilhah] became pregnant
Gen. 16:11 “Behold you are pregnant, and you will bear a son and call his name Yishmael (ישמעאל) for Yahweh has listened (שמע) to your suffering.”	Gen. 30:6 And Rachel said “God has judged for me and also he has listened to my voice (שמע + בקול) ...”
Gen. 16:12-14 Hagar discovers at “Ber-lahai-roi” (באר לחי ראי) that she will give birth to Ishmael, who will be a “wild donkey of a man” (פרא אדם), and his hand (ידו) will be against everyone.”	Gen. 30:5 Bilhah gives birth to Dan Judg. 15:14-16 The most famous “Danite” is Samson, who “came to Lehi (לחי), and he found the jawbone (לחי) of a donkey and he sent out his hand (ידו) and he struck with it a thousand men.”
Replaying Genesis 16. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

Rakhel’s actions with Yaaqov are an intensified replay of Sarah’s actions with Abraham, as well as a contrast with Rivqah from Genesis 25:21.

- Sarai is barren and schemes her own way to produce the promised seed, accusing Abraham when the plan doesn’t work.
- Rivqah is barren, but Yitzhaq intercedes for her, and Yahweh restores fertility to her womb.
- Rakhel is barren, accuses her husband for not giving her sons, and then schemes her own way (identical to Sarah’s) to produce seed.

Of Mandrakes and Bowls of Stew

¹⁴ And Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and he found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah.

And Rakhel said to Leah,
“Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.”

15 **And she said to her,**
"Is it a small matter for **you to take my husband?**
And would **you also take my son's mandrakes** ?!"
And Rakhel said,
"Therefore, **he can lay with you this night,**
in the place of **your son's mandrakes** ."

16 And Yaaqov came **in from the field** in the evening,
and Leah went out to meet him
and she said,
"You must come in to me,
for I have surely paid **a wage (שכר)** for you,
with **my son's mandrakes** ."
And **he lay with her that night.**

Leah's 2 Sons + 1 Daughter

#9 Yissakhar

17 **And Yahweh listened to Leah ,**
and she became pregnant and gave birth to a fifth son,
18 **and Leah said,**
"Yahweh has given **my wage (שכרי)** ,
in that I gave my female slave to my husband."
And she called his name **Yissakhar (יששכר)** .

#10 Zebulun

19 **And Leah became pregnant again and gave birth to a sixth son to Yaaqov,**
20 **and Leah said,**
"Yahweh has **gifted** me (זבדני) with a good **gift** (זבד).
This time my husband will **exalt** me (יזבילני),
because I have birthed six sons for him."
And she called his name Zebulun (זבולון).

#11 Dinah

21 And afterward she gave birth to a daughter,
and she called her name **Dinah** .

Rakhel's 1 Son

#12 Yoseph

22 **And Elohim remembered Rakhel ,**

and Elohim listened to her ,

and he opened her womb ,

²³ and she conceived and gave birth to a son,

and she said,

“God has gathered away (אסף) my humiliation.”

²⁴ And she called his name Yoseph (יוסף),

saying,

“May Yahweh add (יסף) to me another son.”

Genesis 30:14-24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

The mandrake episode (Gen. 30:14-16) is a condensed replay (and elaborate wordplay!) of Yaaqov's deception of Esau with the red stew and of Lavan's deceit concerning Yaaqov's “wages.” It also develops the themes of Genesis 3, where the sought-after blessing is exchanged for food.

Yaaqov's Deceptions and Lavan's Counter-Deceptions	Leah “Hires” Yaaqov for a Night
Yaaqov used stew to deceptively take the birthright from Esau	Leah used mandrakes to deceptively take the promised seed from Rakhel
Gen. 25:29 Esau was coming in “from the field” when Yaaqov tricked him with the stew	Gen. 30:14, 16 Reuben found mandrakes “in the field”, and Leah tricked Rakhel and found Yaaqov when he came in “from the field”
The stew is “red red” (<i>ha’adom ha’adom</i> / האדם האדם)	The mandrakes (<i>duda’im</i> / דודאים)
Gen. 29:15 Lavan cheats Yaaqov out of his “wages” (שכר)	Gen. 30:16 Leah “hires by wage” (שכר) Yaaqov for a night
Of Mandrakes and Bowls of Stew. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

Leah the older sibling usurps the younger, chosen sibling with exotic food (wordplays with Edom from Gen. 25).

“Hebrew *duda’im* has long been identified with the *Mandragora, officinarum*, which grows wild in the fields. Its small, yellow, tomato-like fruit ripens during March and April. Chemical analysis shows it to contain emetic, purgative, and narcotic substances, which explains its widespread medicinal use in ancient times. Because the fruit exudes a distinctive and heady fragrance, and its sturdy, forked or intertwined root has torso-like features, the mandrake appears as a widely diffused folkloristic motif associated with aphrodisiac powers. Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, beauty, and sex, was given the epithet '*hē mandragoriti*,' 'Lady of the Mandrake.' The Hebrew term *duda’im* is close in sound to *dodim*, 'love.' Indeed, the two are associated in the Song of Songs: 'There I will give my love (*dodai*) to you. / The mandrakes (*duda’im*) yield their fragrance ... my beloved (*dodi*)' (7:13–14).”

God Remembered Noah ... And Rakhel

Up to this point in the Genesis scroll, God has only remembered two other people: Noah and those with him, sitting in the ark waiting for the dry land to appear, and Abraham, who interceded on behalf of Lot sitting in Sodom.

Noah	Abraham	Rachel
Gen. 8:1 And Elohim remembered Noah and all the living creatures and all the beasts that were with him in the ark, and Elohim caused a Spirit/wind to pass over the land, and the waters subsided.	Gen. 19:29 And it came about when Yahweh caused the ruin of the cities of the valley, that he remembered Avraham , and he sent Lot out from the middle of the overturning, when he overturned the cities, in which Lot had been dwelling.	Gen. 30:22-23 And Yahweh remembered Rakhel , and he listened to her, and he opened her womb, and she conceived and gave birth to a son,
<i>God Remembered Noah and Rakhel. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).</i>		

In all three stories, the characters are in situations where they are not able save or create life on their own initiative. But in each case, the chosen one becomes the object of Yahweh’s mercy, and their plight gains his attention.

Reflection Question

What does [Genesis 29:31-35](#) show us about God’s heart for people?

Session 16: Rival Wives and Many Sons

Key Takeaways

- Rakhel's words echo Sarah's as she takes matters into her own hands in an attempt to secure Eden blessing for herself.
- The origin of the family of Israel is mired in animosity, trickery, and abuse, yet God continues to pour out Eden blessing on the family he chose to be a blessing to all nations.



This session covers the notes from session 15

Reflection Question

What insights can we gain from contemplating the family of Israel's scandalous beginning?



Module 4: Jacob's Flight From Laban

SESSIONS 17-20

Jacob's brief sojourn turns into a 20-year exile. Will he continue his deceitful ways or learn to trust God? Follow this unfolding saga to find out.

Session 17: Jacob Deceives His Deceiver

Key Takeaways

- Yaaqov and Lavan each try to gain the upper hand over the other. As their wealth increases, so does the tension between them.
- A likely explanation for Yaaqov's use of the rods with the sheep is that they act as artificial mating partners to control which rams are able to successfully mate.
- Yaaqov's use of animal disguises fits a developing pattern of deceit in Genesis.

Lavan the Snake Curses To Get the Blessing

²⁵ And it came about when Rakhel had borne Joseph,
and Yaaqov said to Lavan,

“Send me away,
that I may go to my own place and to my own land.

²⁶ **Give** me my wives and my children for whom I have **served** you, that I may go,
for you yourself know my service which I have served you.”

²⁷ And Lavan said to him,
“If I have found favor in your eyes,
I have learned by divination
that **Yahweh has blessed me on account of you.”**

²⁸ And he said,
“Name me **your wages**,
and **I will give it.”**

²⁹ And he said to him,
“**You yourself know how I have served you**
and how your cattle have been with me,
³⁰ for you had little before I came
and it has **broken out** to a multitude,
and Yahweh has blessed you at my foot.
And now, when may I act for my own household also?”

Genesis 30:25-30. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Now that Yaaqov has worked as Lavan’s slave for 14 years, we learn that Lavan has consulted his gods through divination and learned something true: All abundance and fruitfulness is a gift of Yahweh, the *Elohim* of Yaaqov.

Importantly, Lavan reveals just how he came by this knowledge.

Genesis 30:27 NASB
I have learned by divination (Heb. *nakhash* / נחש) that Yahweh has blessed me on account of you.

The word for “knowledge gained by divination” (*nakhash*) is spelled with the same three letters (= is a homonym) as the Hebrew word for snake (*nakhash*)!

Lavan’s household flourishes under Yaaqov’s care, and Lavan knows its true source. Will Lavan let his golden boy go home?

The Nations and the Blessing

Notice this portrait of Lavan’s desire to benefit from Yaaqov’s blessing and how it contrasts with Yaaqov’s father Yitskhaq and grandfather Abraham. This all began with the programmatic statement that God made to Abraham, and was then repeated to Yaaqov by Yitskhaq.

Genesis 12:3 NASB
And I will bless those who bless you,
and the one who treats you as cursed (מקלל) I will curse (ארר).
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Genesis 27:29 NASB
May peoples serve you,
and may people groups bow down to you,
be a mighty one to your brothers,
and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.
Cursed (ארר) are those who curse (ארר) you,
and those who blessed you are blessed.

Abraham and Avimelek	Yitskhaq and Avimelek	Jacob and Laban
Gen. 20 Abraham deceives Avimelek regarding Sarah his wife	Gen. 26 Yitskhaq deceives Avimelek regarding his wife	Gen. 29 Laban deceives Jacob regarding his daughter
Gen. 21:22-34 Avimelek comes to Abraham in peace	Gen. 26:14-16 The Philistines are envious of Jacob, so Avimelek	Gen. 30:27-28 And Laban said to Jacob,

Patriarchal Promises in Genesis. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Abraham and Avimelek	Yitskhaq and Avimelek	Jacob and Laban
"I see that Elohim is with you in all that you are doing. Now, swear an oath to me by Elohim ..."	says, "Go away from us, for you are too powerful!" Gen. 26:28 But later he comes back to Yitskhaq and says, "We see that Yahweh has been with you, and we said 'Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you!'"	"If I have found favor in your eyes, I have learned by divination that Yahweh has blessed me on account of you. ... Now then, mark your wages and I will give it."
<i>Patriarchal Promises in Genesis. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).</i>		

Notice the variety of responses.

- Abimelech with Abraham: Positive recognition of Yahweh's blessing > desire for a covenant
- Abimelech with Yitskhaq: Negative reaction, followed by a positive recognition of Yahweh's blessing > desire for covenant
- Lavan with Yaaqov: Seemingly positive recognition of Yahweh's blessing > no desire for a covenant, but instead negotiation about a deal: "Mark your wages."

The phrase "mark your wages" uses an uncommon Hebrew word: *noqbah* / נִקְבָּה, from the root *naqab* / נִקַּב, which means "to pierce, mark."

- This root (*naqab*) is a by-form (a homonym) of another Hebrew root, *qabab* / קָבַב, and both mean "to mark for a curse." (See Lev. 24:11, 16; Job 3:8; Prov. 11:26 where it is spelled *yiqqob* / יִקֵּב, ironically the main letters of Yaaqov's name יַעֲקֹב!)
- This root (קָבַב often spelled יִקֵּב, which looks like how נִקַּב is spelled when it means "marked as cursed") is one of the main Hebrew words for "curse" (קָבַב) that is used in the Balaam narratives in Numbers 22-24. And low and behold, it shows a remarkable number of hyperlinks with the stories of Yitskhaq and Abimelech and Yaaqov and Lavan!

Numbers 22:5-6, 11, 17 NASB*

⁵ So [the king of Moab] sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, at Pethor, which is near the River, in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, "Behold, a people came out of Egypt; behold, they cover the surface of the land, and they are living opposite me. ⁶ Now, therefore, please come, **curse (אָרַר)** this people for me since **they are too powerful for me;** perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that **he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse (אָרַר) is cursed (אָרַר).**"

¹¹ "Behold, there is a people who came out of Egypt and they cover the surface of the land; now come, **curse (קָבַב)** them for me; perhaps I may be able to fight against them and drive them out."

¹⁷ “for I will indeed honor you richly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Please come then, **curse** (קבב) this people for me.”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Numbers 23:7-8, 11, 25-26 NASB*

⁷ He took up his discourse and said, “From Aram Balak has brought me, Moab’s king from the mountains of the East, ‘Come **curse** (ארר) Yaaqov for me, And come, denounce Israel!’ ⁸ How shall I **curse** (קבב) whom God has not **cursed** (קבב)? ...”

¹¹ Then Balak said to Balaam, “What have you done to me? I took you to **curse** (קבב) my enemies, but behold, you have actually **blessed** them!”

²⁵ Then Balak said to Balaam, “Do not **curse** (קב לא תקבנו) them at all nor **bless** them at all!” ²⁶ But Balaam replied to Balak, “Did I not tell you, ‘Whatever the Lord speaks, that I must do’?”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Numbers 24:9-10 NASB*

⁹ “He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him? **Blessed** is everyone who **blesses** you, and **cursed** (ארר) is everyone who **curses** (ארר) you.” ¹⁰ Then Balak’s anger burned against Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam, “I called you to **curse** (קבב) my enemies, but behold, you have persisted in blessing them these three times!”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

These narratives lay out a program, a foundational statement, for the role of God’s chosen, blessed one among the nations. Some nations quickly recognize God’s chosen ones and enter into the covenant and discover God’s blessing: Eshkol and Aner the Canaanites (Gen. 14), Abimelech (Gen. 21 and 26). Others don’t care and oppress God’s chosen ones (Pharaoh in Exod. 1, Balak king of Moab in Num. 22-24).

Others take a while to come around, like Abimelech in Genesis 26 and Lavan in Genesis 30. Abimelech wants to reject God’s chosen one but eventually comes around. Lavan wants to mooch off of the blessing of Yaaqov but finds himself deceived and cheated just as he did to Yaaqov!

Paragraph 2: Genesis 30:31-36

³¹ And he said,
“**What shall I give you?**”

And Yaaqov said,

“**You will not give me anything.**

If you will do this thing for me,

I will again **shepherd** and keep **your flock**:

³² Let me pass through your entire flock **today**,

removing from there

every speckled and spotted lamb
and every dark one among the male-sheep
and the spotted and speckled among the she-goats;
and it shall be my wage.

³³ And my righteousness will answer for me on a following day ,
when you go over my wage before you,
every one that is not speckled and spotted among the she-goats
and dark among the male-sheep with me,
will be considered stolen.”

³⁴ And Lavan said,
“Behold, let it be according to your word.”

³⁵ And he [= Lavan] removed on that day
the striped and spotted male goats
and all the speckled and spotted female goats,
every one with white [= laban] in it,
and all the black ones among the sheep,
and gave them into the care of his sons.

³⁶ And he put a journey of three days between himself and Yaaqov,
and as for Yaaqov, he shepherded the rest of Lavan’s flocks.

Genesis 30:31-36. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Paragraph 3: Genesis 30:37-43

³⁷ And Yaaqov took rods of poplar [=lebenah] ,
fresh, as well as almond and plane,
and he peeled white (laban) stripes in them,
exposing the white (laban) on the rods.

³⁸ And he placed the rods which he had peeled
by the troughs ,
by the water-troughs where the flocks came to drink,
in front of the flock,
and they mated when they came to drink.

³⁹ And the flocks mated with/upon the rods,
and the flocks gave birth to striped , speckled , and spotted .

40 And the lambs Yaaqov separated,
and he made the **flocks** face toward the **striped** and all the **black** in the **flock** of **Lavan** ;
and he **placed** his own herds apart,
and he did not **place** them with **Lavan's flock**.

41 And it came about in all the **mating** of **the strong ones** of the **flock**,
Yaaqov would place the **rods**
in the sight of the flock
in the troughs ,
so that they would **mate** with the **rods** ;
42 and when the **flock** was **weak** ,
he did not place them
and the **weak ones** belonged to **Lavan**
and the **strong ones** belonged to Yaaqov.

43 And the **man broke** out very much,
and there belonged to him **many flocks**,
and female and male **servants**,
and camels and donkeys.

Genesis 30:37-43. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Of Speckled Sheep and Mating Rods

This story is a detailed explanation of how Yaaqov eventually gets the upper hand over his deceptive uncle. He puts himself in what seems to be a vulnerable situation, but then he uses an ancient animal breeding trick to produce a large flock for himself. However, exactly what Yaaqov does with his flocks is a matter of debate among scholars because the story's vocabulary and narrative are difficult to understand.

For the discussion that follows, see Scott Noegel's [“Sex, Sticks, and Tricksters in Genesis 30:31-43: A New Look at an Old Crux”](#) in *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*, vol. 25 (1997), p. 7-17.

A common explanation says Yaaqov uses the rods mentioned [Gen. 30:37-42](#) in either a superstitious ritual or as an aphrodisiac to incite the mating of the correctly colored animals.

“[Jacob acts] on the common belief that a vivid sight during pregnancy or conception would leave its mark on the embryo.”

Kidner, Derek (2008). [Genesis \(Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries\)](#). IVP Academic. 163.

There are two main problems with this explanation.

1. All evidence of this strange belief in Jewish culture dates to the 5th century A.D. and later—over 1,500 years later than the time of Yaaqov!

2. If the sticks were some kind of aphrodisiac, this does not explain why he places the rods out when the “strong ones” of Lavan’s flock were mating (30:41-42.) If they induce mating and fertility, we would expect the opposite.

The more likely explanation says the sticks were placed as “false mating partners.”

- Genesis 30:39 says in Hebrew that “the flock mated against/upon the rods (אל המקלות).”
- Genesis 30:41 says in Hebrew “the flock mated with the rods (במקלות).”

“[T]he passage depicts Jacob employing the poplar rods not as a fertility symbol or aphrodisiac, but rather as a type of ‘fake phallus.’ That is, Jacob allowed only the animals which he did not want to sire offspring to ‘become heated upon the rods.’ Herders and veterinarians acquainted with the breeding patterns of sheep and goats are well-aware that while female lambs are in heat, they are often inclined to rub their genitals on trees or sticks ... Like Jacob in Gen. 30:40, animal breeders often employ artificial mating devices along with ‘teaser animals,’ i.e., males introduced into the flock to induce the females into early heat. This practice is precisely what Jacob exploits in Gen. 30:39-41.”

Noegel, Scott B. (1997). “Sex, Sticks, and the Trickster in Gen. 30:31-43: A New Look at an Old Crux.” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Society*, vol. 25. 10.

The sequence of the narrative, while difficult to follow, makes more sense once we see that the rods function as artificial mating devices.

1. In Genesis 30:32, Yaaqov requests that his wages consist of: (a) “every speckled and spotted lamb,” (b) “every dark among the male-lambs,” and (c) “every spotted and speckled she-goat.”
 - Later in the narrative, we learn that some of Yaaqov's own flocks are already oddly colored (30:40). Here, Yaaqov proposes that the oddly colored ones among Lavan’s flock will belong to himself.
 - Yaaqov's named wage still leaves among Lavan’s flock (a & b) the speckled, spotted, and dark female lambs (“ewes”), and (c) all the spotted and speckled male-goats.
2. In Gen. 30:35, Lavan removes from his own flock (not from Yaaqov's, see 30:40) all the goats that might produce speckled, spotted, and dark young for Yaaqov. This includes: (a) striped and spotted he-goats, (b) speckled and spotted she-goats, (c) every goat with white on it, and (d) every dark sheep.
3. In Genesis 30:36, Lavan puts the distance of three days between his own flocks and Yaaqov who is now caring for Yaaqov's flock. This is Lavan’s newest attempt to cheat Yaaqov. He is removing the animals that would, under natural circumstances, be used for breeding the animals that Yaaqov has named as his wages.
4. In Genesis 30:37, Yaaqov creates mating sticks out of three kinds of aromatic trees (poplar, almond, plane), which exude a milky substance when peeled. Notice the wordplay and intentional irony: The sticks which Yaaqov uses to cheat Lavan (לבן) are themselves the color of “white” (= Hebrew *Lavan* / לבן).
5. In Genesis 30:38, Yaaqov places the sticks “by/on the *rehatim* (רהטים), by the watering troughs where the females of the flock came to drink, facing the flock, and they mated when the females came to drink.”
 - Given the make up of the flock left to Yaaqov in 30:35, the only female animals this can refer to are the speckled and spotted female lambs and the striped and dark she-goats.
 - The rare noun *rehatim* could mean “trough” (as in Exod. 2:16), but a cognate noun is also used in Song of Songs 7:6 to describe flowing hair, which could make good sense here: it would mean

that Yaaqov is creating fake male sheep and goats with “rods” to mate with that will produce no offspring.

6. In Genesis 30:39, we’re told that the flocks mate “against/upon the rods” and “the flocks bore striped, speckled, and spotted.” Since the animals give birth to striped, speckled, and spotted young, the animals that mated on the poplar rods must have been Lavan’s dark she-goats. They, of course, did not bear any offspring. Conversely, only the few speckled and spotted female lambs, and the striped goats that were not placed near the rods, bring forth young. From these, Yaaqov takes for himself the spotted and speckled female lambs and he-goats (as he said in Gen. 30:32).
7. In Genesis 30:40, Yaaqov separates the speckled and spotted sheep that belong to him, and “made them face the striped and all the dark ones in the flock of Lavan.” That is, he uses his female lambs and mates them with Lavan’s male lambs of the same color. He exploits Lavan’s striped and dark sheep to produce his own wages.
8. In Genesis 30:41-42, Yaaqov distinguishes among Lavan’s flock between the sheep that breed early (“the strong”) and those that breed late (“the weak”), and he allows only the strong to mate against the rods, thus producing no young. However, when his own flocks were drinking (as 30:42 implies) Yaaqov did not set out the rods, so that “the weak ones belong to Lavan and the strong ones to Yaaqov.”

Conclusion: Yaaqov uses a subtle, deceptive technique to make sure his own animals multiply while Lavan’s slowly dwindle.

Yaaqov Among the Deceivers in Genesis

Yaaqov's use of “animal disguises” and perhaps even “flowing hair” (the *rehotim* in Gen. 30:38, 41) fits into a larger motif in the Genesis scroll, where characters use “animal deceptions” to accomplish their plans.

- The animal skin used by Yaaqov to impersonate Esau (Gen. 27:16).
- The goat’s blood smeared on the coat by Joseph’s brothers (Gen. 37:31).
- Tamar, who gets Judah to promise her a young goat so she can rescue the promised lineage by sleeping with her father-in-law (Gen. 38:17, 23).

Yaaqov's “mating rods” also connect to Leah’s “mandrakes” in the previous literary unit. Both are “fertile items of irony.”

“The mandrakes are eaten by the barren Rachel, but it is Leah who conceives. The rods perform a similar function. They are meant to inspire Laban’s herds to copulate, but to no effect ... Jacob's manipulation of Laban’s flocks also mirrors Laban’s deception of Jacob in 29:21-30. Just as Laban deceives Jacob in receiving the older Leah (lit. ‘Calf’) instead of younger Rachel (lit. ‘Female Lamb’) as a wife, so now it is the ‘stronger’ of Laban’s flocks which Jacob places before the impotent rods.”

Noegel, Scott B. (1997). “Sex, Sticks, and the Trickster in Gen. 30:31-43: A New Look at an Old Crux.” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Society*, vol. 25. 14-15.

Lavan’s deception of Yaaqov and Yaaqov's counter-deception aimed at acquiring many goats and sheep stand in contrast to Abraham, who trusted Yahweh to provide the “lamb” as a substitute in the ‘*aqedah*’ of Genesis 22. In that story, the animal stands in the place of the human Yitskhaq.

- Lavan removes all the striped (עקד) sheep (שה) and goats (Gen. 30:32, 35, 39, 40; 31:8, 10). This is the only appearance of this rare Hebrew root word in Genesis, except for the once verbal root “bind” (עקד) in Genesis 22:9, where Abraham prepares Yitskhaq as the sacrificial “lamb” (שה)!
- Genesis 30:36: Lavan sends the “striped” (עקד) flocks away with his sons a journey of “three days.” (שלשת ימים) // Abraham and his son travel for “three days” without a lamb, before Abraham “binds” (עקד) his son.
- Genesis 30:38: Yaaqov places the poplar rods in the water trough (שקת) as his scheme to increase his flocks. // Avraham’s servant in Genesis 24:21 meets Rivqah at the water trough (שקת) and allows God to provide her as a wife. This is a contrast between Yaaqov's scheme and Abraham and his servant's trust in God's provision.

Yaaqov's deception of Lavan regarding his flock leads us back to the Genesis 3 deception, by linking together the motifs of sibling rivalry and the deception of the firstborn.

Genesis 30:25-43: Yaaqov Deceives Lavan of His Flock	Hyperlinks in Genesis
Gen. 30:27 “I have learned by divination (נחשתי) that Yahweh has blessed me because of you.”	Gen. 3:1 The snake (נחש) resents that God has elevated humans to a place of rule over the beasts.
Gen. 30:37 “And Yaaqov took for himself a staff of fresh poplar and almond wood and plane tree (ערמון)”	Gen. 3:1 “Now the snake was more shrewd (ערום) than any beast of the field”
Gen. 30:40 “And the lambs Yaaqov separated (פרד < הפריד), he gave the flocks to face the spotted.”	The פרד / separation of brothers motif in Genesis Gen. 2:10 Separation of the Eden waters Gen. 10:5, 32 Separation of the sons of Noah Gen. 13:9, 11, 14 Abram and Lot separate (הפרד) because of their flocks. Gen. 25:23 Yaaqov and Esau separate from the womb
Gen. 30:32, 39-42 The puns on the sheep that are “hot” (חום) and who “mate/are in heat” (חום).	Gen. 10:5, 32 Ham (חם) the son of Noah that “separates” from his brothers
Connecting Yaaqov's Deception and Genesis 3. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

Reflection Question

Yaaqov claims that his “righteousness will answer” for him in the deal he makes with Lavan for the flocks (Gen. 30:33). Do Yaaqov's actions demonstrate righteousness?

Session 18: Jacob Versus the Narrator

Key Takeaways

- Yaaqov sees how Lavan's "face" has changed toward him, beginning a pattern of reckoning, where Yaaqov will have to "face" those he has deceived.
- Yaaqov ascribes his prosperity to God, but his account contradicts the narrator's presentation.
- The virgin birth of Jesus brings new creation life to the world free from the manipulation of human desires and scheming.

Yaaqov Persuades His Wives to Flee

¹ And he heard the words of Lavan's sons (בני לבן), saying,
"Yaaqov has taken away **all that belongs to our father** (לאבינו) ,
and from **what belongs to our father** (לאבינו)
he has made all this wealth."

² **And Yaaqov saw the face of Lavan** (פני לבן),
and behold, it was not toward him as formerly.

³ And Yahweh said to Yaaqov,
" **Return to the land of your fathers and to your birth-family,**
and I will be with you ."

⁴ And Yaaqov sent,
and he called Rakhel and Leah to his flock in the field,

⁵ and said to them,
" **I see your father's face,**
that it is not toward me as formerly,
but **the God of my father has been with me .**

⁶ And you know that I have served **your father** with all my strength.

⁷ And **your father** has cheated me
and **he has changed my wages ten times;**
and God did not allow him to do evil to me.

⁸ If he said this, 'The **speckled** shall be **your wage**,'
then all the flock brought forth **speckled** ;
and if he said this, 'The **striped** shall be **your wage**,'
then all the flock brought forth **striped** .

⁹ And **God has delivered the livestock of your father and given to me .**

10 And it came about at the time when the flock were mating and **I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream**, and behold,
the male goats which were going up onto the flock ,
were striped, speckled, and mottled .

11 And the angel of God said to me **in the dream**, ‘Yaaqov,’
and I said, ‘Here I am.’

12 And he said,
‘**Lift now your eyes and see**,
all **the male goats which are going up onto the flock**
are striped, speckled, and mottled ;
for **I have seen** all that Lavan has been doing to you.

13 I am the God of Bethel,
where you anointed a pillar,
where you made a vow to me;
now arise, go out from this land ,
and return to the land of your birth-family :’”

14 **And Rakhel and Leah said** to him,
“Do we still have any portion or inheritance in **our father’s** house?

15 Are we not reckoned by him as foreigners?
For he has sold us and has also entirely consumed our silver.

16 **Surely all the wealth which God has delivered from our father (מאבינו) ,**
it belongs to us and to our sons (לנו ולבנינו) .
Now then, whatever God has said to you, do it !”

Genesis 31:1-16. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Yaaqov and Abraham

God’s appearance to Yaaqov in Genesis 31:3 is the first time God has spoken to Yaaqov since the Bethel dream in Genesis 28:10-22 (Bethel will be brought up later in this unit in Gen. 31:13). Here, the language of the Bethel dream is recalled, and it’s also connected to God’s words to Abraham, creating an important analogy between Yaaqov and Abraham.

Genesis 28:10-22

God Appears to Yaaqov at Bethel

- “Look, I am with you”
- “I will return you to this land”

Genesis 29:1-30:43

Yaaqov's Exile in Lavan's house

Genesis 31:1-16

God Appears to Yaaqov in Exile

- “Return to the land of your fathers and your **birth-family**”
- “And I will be with you”
- “Return to the land of your **birth-family**”

Genesis 28:10-31:16. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

The word “birth-family” (Heb. מוֹלַדָּת) is the same key word God used when he addressed Abraham and told him to leave this exact same place, Kharan, and go to the land of Canaan.

Genesis 12:1 Instructor's Translation

Go forth from your land,
and from your **birth-family**,
and from your father's house,
to the land which I will make seen to you;

Yet in Genesis 24, when Abraham sends his servant to “the land of my birth family” (Gen. 24:4, 7), this refers to Kharan, where Yaaqov has been exiled. Now, in the 20 years of Yaaqov's exile, the situation has reversed. Canaan is the “land of your birth-family” for Yaaqov, and so now becomes the home-base to which he must return.

Yaaqov, the grandson of Abraham and the inheritor of the promise and blessing, is now the new “Adam/Abraham.”

Yaaqov Versus the Narrator

Yaaqov's speech to his wives is curious in many ways. He recounts the fact that Yahweh appeared to him, summoning him to return to his homeland. But when he recounts the story of Lavan's deception and the breeding of the flocks, he offers a report that differs from the one given by the narrator in Genesis 30.

The comparison chart below shows the differences. Yaaqov's version consistently skews the details in his favor, and gives the feeling that he is manipulating the story to persuade his wives and secure his desired outcome.

Yaaqov's Speech in Genesis 31:4-13

Gen. 31:4-5 And Yaaqov sent **and called Rachel and Leah** to his flock in the field,
and said to them,
“I see **your father's** face,

The Narratives Referred to in Genesis 30-31

Gen. 31:3 **Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you** .

Yaaqov's Speech in Genesis 31. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Yaaqov's Speech in Genesis 31:4-13

The Narratives Referred to in Genesis 30-31

that it is not toward me as formerly,
but **the God of my father has been with me.**"

Gen. 31:6-7 And you know that I have served **your father** with all my strength.
And **your father** has cheated me and changed my wages ten times;
and God did not allow him to do evil to me.

Gen. 31:8-9 If [Lavan] said this,
"The **speckled** shall be your wages,"
then all the flock brought forth **speckled** ;
and if [Lavan] said this,
"The **striped** shall be your wages,"
then all the flock brought forth **striped** .
And God has delivered **your father's** livestock
and given to me.

Gen. 31:10-12 And it came about at the time when
the flock were mating, and **I lifted my eyes and
saw in a dream**, and behold, **the male goats
which were going up onto the flock, the striped,
speckled, and mottled** .
And the angel of God said to me **in the dream**,
"Yaaqov," and I said, "Here I am."
And he said, "**Lift now your eyes and see** ,
all **the male goats which are going up onto the
flock are striped, speckled, and mottled** ;
for **I have seen** all that Lavan has been doing to
you."

Gen. 29:15 Aren't you my brother? Should you
serve me for nothing? Tell me, what is your wage?

Gen. 30:32 I will pass through your flock today,
removing every lamb that is speckled and spotted
... and it will be my wage.

Gen. 30:34 And Lavan said, "Let it be according to
your word."

Gen. 30:39 And the flock birthed striped,
speckled, and spotted.

Gen. 30:37-42 And Yaaqov took **rods** of fresh
poplar and almond and plane trees,
and he **peeled white** stripes in them, exposing the
white on the **rods**.
And he placed the **rods** which he had **peeled
in front of the flock, in the troughs**,
in the watering troughs, where the flocks **came to
drink**;
and they **mated** when they **came to drink**.
And the flocks **mated** with/upon the **rods**,
and the flocks gave birth to **striped** , **speckled** ,
and **spotted**
And it came about in all the **mating** of **the strong
ones** of the flock,
Yaaqov would set the **rods** **in the sight of the
flock in the troughs** ,
so that they would **mate** by the **rods**;
and when the flock was **weak** ,
he did not set them
and the **weak ones** belonged to Lavan
and the **strong ones** belonged to Yaaqov.

Yaaqov's Speech in Genesis 31. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Yaaqov's Speech in Genesis 31:4-13	The Narratives Referred to in Genesis 30-31
Gen. 31:13 I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to me;	Reference back to Gen. 28:10-22
Gen. 31:13 ... now arise, go out this land, and return to the land of your birth.	Gen. 31:3 Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you.
Yaaqov's Speech in Genesis 31. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

Notice how Yaaqov's speech opens and closes in [Genesis 31:5](#) and [31:13](#) with adapted quotations of each part of the divine speech from Genesis 31:3.

The center part of the speech is an abbreviated summary of Yaaqov and Lavan's interactions from [Genesis 29-30](#).

The report of Yaaqov's dream, however, differs significantly from the narrative in [30:30-42](#).

- Yaaqov presents the mating of the flocks as happening completely under God's direction (like Noah's animals getting on and off the ark). Yaaqov omits all mentions of his manipulation of the flock with fake mating rods.
- Yaaqov also omits any reference to his selective breeding, how he would place the rods by the strong of the flock so that Lavan's animals would get weaker over time.
- While subtle, this seems to be a narrative strategy to portray Yaaqov's dream report as unreliable. While it is true that God spoke to him at Bethel and summoned him back to Canaan, his representation of what happened with their father's flocks is portrayed as yet another act of manipulation, this time to persuade Lavan's daughters to come with him back to Canaan. In contrast to Abraham's servant in [Genesis 24](#), who trusted God and let Rivqah make her own choice to come back to Canaan with him, here Yaaqov manipulates his wives by twisting the story of his manipulation of Lavan's flocks. Once again, Yaaqov doesn't trust God's words in [Genesis 31:3](#) ("I will be with you"), and he schemes his own way to realize the divine blessing and promise.

Yaaqov's speech and Rakhel and Leah's response in Genesis 31:5-16 is a sophisticated summary of chapters 29-30, which has been interwoven with larger design patterns in Genesis.

- [Genesis 31:8-9](#) summarizes the sheep-mating deception Yaaqov performed in [Genesis 30:25-43](#).
- [Genesis 31:10-12](#) links Yaaqov's deception to a dream that is similar to his Bethel dream-vision in [Genesis 28:10-22](#), but this dream is specifically patterned after the 'aqedah of [Genesis 22](#). Yaaqov "lifts his eyes" during a dream about his deception of Lavan, in contrast to the scene where Abraham is about to sacrifice Yitskhaq and the "angel of Yahweh" calls out and he responds "here I am" and he "lifts his eyes" and sees a ram caught in the thicket ([Gen. 22:12-13](#)). Here we discover that God allowed Yaaqov's treachery (the opposite of Abraham's faithfulness) to create fruitfulness, even though it contrasts with Abraham's faithfulness that resulted in fruitfulness.

- In Genesis 31:10-11, the vocabulary of Yaaqov's dream echoes his earlier dream in Genesis 28:10-22: He looks up and see goats “going up” (עלים) and “speckled” (ברדים, a pun on “the one going down” ירדים in Gen. 28:10-22).
- Genesis 31:13 is a reference back to Yaaqov's vow at Bethel back in Genesis 28:20, and it's a link back to the beginning of this episode (Gen. 31:3), which is God's command that Yaaqov leave Kharan, cast in language identical to God's command that Abraham leave Kharan and go to Canaan (Gen. 12:1).
- In Genesis 31:14-15, Rakhel and Leah's response recalls Yaaqov's deception of Esau. “Do we still have a share (חלק) and inheritance (נחלה) in the house of our father?” This recalls Yaaqov's smooth (חלק) skin (Gen. 27:11, 16) that allowed him to swindle Esau of his inheritance. Their description of Lavan's “selling” (מכר) and “eating” (אכל) his daughters inheritance recalls Esau's behavior in the same story, where he “sells” his birthright to “eat” a bowl of lentils (Gen. 25:33).

Reflection Question

What are two ways we could read Yaaqov's account of his prosperity with the flocks? How can we discern the meaning of this story?

Session 19: Lavan Pursues Jacob

Key Takeaways

- Both Yaaqov and Lavan deceive each other and then proclaim their innocence. Each feels justified in his anger because of the wrongs of the other.
- The household gods (Heb. *teraphim*) were commonly used in divination to consult the will of the gods.
- Rakhel's theft of the household gods parallels Yaaqov's theft of the flocks, both believing that their fertility, security, and future will be provided by taking matters into their own hands.

Lavan Chases and Overtakes Yaaqov

17 And Yaaqov arose and put **his children** and **his wives** upon camels;

18 and he led away all **his livestock**
and all **his property**, which **he** had gathered,
his acquired livestock, which **he** had gathered in Paddan-aram,
to go to Yitskhaq his father, to the land of Canaan.

19 Now, Lavan had gone to shear his flock,
and **Rakhel stole the household idols** that were her father's.

20 And **Yaaqov stole the heart of Lavan** (לב לבן) the Aramean
by **not reporting** to him that he was **fleeing**.

21 And **he fled**, he and **everything that belonged to him**,
and he arose and crossed the river,
and he set his face toward **the hill country of Gilead**.

22 And **it was reported** to Lavan on the third day that Yaaqov **had fled**,

23 and **he took his brothers** with him
and chased after him seven days' journey,
and he clung to (וידבק) him in **the hill country of Gilead**.

24 And **God came to Lavan** the Aramean in a dream **of the night and said to him**,
“**Guard yourself**,
so that you don't speak to Yaaqov either good or evil.”

25 **And Lavan overtook Yaaqov.**

And Yaaqov had pitched his tent in **the hill country** ,
and **Lavan had pitched with his brothers** in **the hill country of Gilead** .

26 And Lavan said to Yaaqov,

“ **What** have you done,
that you should **steal my heart**
and lead away my daughters like captives of the sword?

27 **Why did you** hide yourself to **flee** and **steal me**,
and **did not report to me**
that I might have sent you away with joy and with songs, with timbrel and with lyre;
28 and you did not allow me to kiss **my sons (לבני)** **and my daughters (לבנות)** ?
Now you have acted foolishly.

29 It is in my power to do you **evil** ,
but **the Elohim of your father spoke to me last night, saying**,
‘ **Guard yourself** ,
so as not to speak to Yaaqov either good or evil .’

30 And now, you have indeed gone away,
because you longed greatly for your father’s house;
Why did you **steal my elohim**?”

31 **And Yaaqov replied and he said to Lavan** ,

“Because I was afraid,
for I said, ‘So that you don’t seize your daughters from me!’

32 **With whomever you find your elohim**, that one will not live!
In the presence of our brothers, recognize what is yours from what is with me, and take it! ”
Now, Yaaqov did not know that Rakhel had **stolen them**.

33 And Lavan went into **Yaaqov's** tent
and into **Leah's** tent
and into the tent of **the two maids**,
but he did not find .

And he went out of **Leah's** tent,
and entered **Rakhel's** tent.

34 Now, Rakhel had taken **the household idols**
and she put them in the camel’s saddle,
and she sat on them.
And Lavan felt through all the tent
but he did not find .

35 And she said to her father,
“Don’t let there be **hot-anger** in the eyes of my master,
because I’m not able to rise before you,
for the way of women is upon me.”
And he searched,
but he did not find the household idols.

36 And there was **hot-anger** to Yaaqov,
and **he entered into a contention** with Lavan;

and Yaaqov replied and he said to Lavan,

“What is my transgression?!
What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me?

37 Though you have felt through all **my goods**,
what have you found of all the **goods of your house**?
Place it here in front of my brothers and your brothers,
that they may **act as the mediator** between us two.

38 **These twenty years I was with you ;**
your ewe-lambs (רָחֵל) and your female goats have not miscarried,
nor have I eaten the rams (אֵילִי) of your flocks.

39 That which was torn of beasts, I did not bring to you;
I bore the loss of it myself.
You required it of my hand,
stolen by **day** or **stolen** by **night** .

40 During the **day** I was eaten by the heat,
and by the frost at **night**,
and my sleep fled from my eyes.

41 **These twenty years I have been in your house ;**
I served you four-ten years for your two daughters,
and six years for your flock,
and you changed my wages ten times.

42 **If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had not been for me ,**
surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed.
God has seen my affliction and the toil of my hands,
and he **acted as a mediator** last night.”

Genesis 31:17-42. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Yaaqov's Ancestral Deception Exposed

In this section, Yaaqov is confronted by Lavan in a way that recalls the earlier stories about Abraham and Yitskhaq's deception of Abimelech.

Yaaqov's Deception	Yitskhaq's Deception	Abraham's Deception
Gen. 29, 31 Yaaqov manipulates Laban's flocks to increase his own and decrease Laban's, after Laban lied about his daughter and "gave" him the wrong wife.	Gen. 26:1-11 Yitskhaq lies to the Philistines and Abimelech about his wife being his sister	Gen. 20 Abraham lies to the Philistines and Abimelech about his wife being his sister
Gen. 31:24 God confronts Laban in "a dream of the night"		Gen. 20:3 God confronts Abimelech in a "dream of the night"
Gen. 31:31 Yaaqov confesses his deception "Because I was afraid (כי יראתי), because I said (כי אמרתי), 'So that you don't steal (פן תגזול) your daughters from me!'"	Gen. 26:7 Yitskhaq's deception "And he said, 'She is my sister,' because he was afraid to say (כי ירא לאמר), 'my wife,' so that 'the men of the place don't murder me (פן יהרגני) on account of Rivqah.'"	Gen. 20:10-11 Abraham's deception "And Abimelech said to Abraham, 'What did you see (ראית), that you have done this thing?' And Abraham said, 'It's because I said (כי אמרתי), 'Surely there is no fear (יראת) of Elohim in this place, so they will murder me on account of my wife.'""
Gen. 30:43 Yaaqov's wealth from his deception "And the man broke out very, very much, and there were for him many flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys."	Gen. 26:13-14 Yitskhaq's wealth after his deception "And [Yitskhaq] became great, and continued to grow great, until he became very great; and he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household"	Gen. 20:14 Abraham's wealth from his deception "And Abimelech took flocks and cattle and slaves and female slaves, and he gave them to Abraham, and he returned to him Sarah his wife."
Yaaqov's Generational Deception. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).		

These intentional comparisons confirm that Yaaqov's strategy with Lavan's flocks was a fear-inspired manipulation, and so was his secretive flight from Lavan's house.

Yaaqov's fear of Lavan is set on analogy with Abraham and Yitskhaq's fear of the Philistines, and his fear represents a lack of trust in Yahweh's promise that "I will be with you."

Yaaqov's Flight and Rakhel's Theft

Notice how Yaaqov and Rakhel's "thefts" are set on close analogy to each other in [Genesis 31:19-30](#).

Genesis 31:19-20 NASB

19 ... and Rachel stole the household idols that were her father's.

20 And Jacob stole the heart of Laban the Aramean

This tight analogy invites us to ponder all the ways that Yaaqov has "stolen" from Lavan (through manipulation of the flocks, and now by fleeing in secret). But recall that Yaaqov's deceptive theft of Lavan's flocks, and now of his daughters, is a continuation of the ways that Yaaqov had also deceived his own father and brother with food and disguises, all aimed at acquiring the blessing of Eden abundance.

The analogy is brought even closer in the curious scene where Lavan searches and "feels" for his idol gods in the tent. This entire scene is a replay of Yaaqov's deception of his father.

Jacob Deceives His Father	Rachel Deceives Her Father
Gen. 27:8-13 Rebekah proposes the scheme, and invites "the curse" (קללה) to come upon her if Jacob is found out.	Gen. 31:31-32 Jacob proposes the secretive flight, and invokes a curse upon whoever stole the idols: "Whoever is found to have your idol-gods, they will not live!"
Gen. 27:15-16 Jacob dresses up with goat skin	Gen. 31:34 Rachel sits upon the camel-saddle
Gen. 27:21-23 Yitskhaq "feels" (משש) Jacob's arms and doesn't find out his true identity	Gen. 31:34-35 Laban "feels" (משש) through Rachel's tent and doesn't find the idol-gods
Yaaqov's Deception and Rakhel's Theft. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

The network of analogies mutually illuminates the motives of the characters in each case.

- Yaaqov "stole" the blessing from Esau/Yitskhaq in order to gain the abundance of Eden.
- Yaaqov "stole" the flocks of Lavan in order to gain abundance for himself and his family.
- Rakhel "stole" the idol-gods of Lavan in order to gain ... what?

It's surely intentional that we are not told about Rakhel's motives for stealing the idol-gods. We're meant to meditate on the portrait of her character and on the meaning of these analogies to understand her actions. It also helps to know what the *teraphim* actually are!

What Were the Teraphim/Idol-Gods?

Teraphim (Heb. תרפים) are small idol statues that were placed in homes (tents, houses) or in the home of a deity (shrine, temple). A quick survey of the word's usage in the Hebrew Bible shows the role they played in Canaanite and Israelite religion.

2 Kings 23:24 NASB

Moreover, Josiah removed **the mediums and the diviners and the *teraphim* and the idols** and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might confirm the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD.

Ezekiel 21:21 NASB

For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, **to use divination; he shakes the arrows, he consults the *teraphim*, he looks at the liver.**

Zechariah 10:2 NASB

For **the *teraphim* speak iniquity, and the diviners see lying visions and tell false dreams;** they comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander like sheep, they are afflicted, because there is no shepherd.

These texts make clear that the *teraphim* were consulted in ritual practices in order to gain information from the gods. This brings to mind one other important moment in the Yaaqov story that brings all the pieces together.

Genesis 30:27-28 Instructor's Translation

And Lavan said to Yaaqov, "If I have found favor in your eyes, **I have learned by divination that Yahweh has blessed me on account of you.** Now then, **mark** your wages and I will give it."

How is it that Lavan "learned by divination" (spelled *nakhash*, same letters as "snake" in Hebrew) that Yaaqov was the source of Yahweh's blessing on his household? The narrative doesn't say in the moment, but delays telling us until Rakhel steals the idol-gods!

Just as Lavan consulted his *teraphim* to discern the source of his abundance in order to gain more, so now his daughter steals the idols in order to do the same. Remember, Rakhel has born only one son in comparison to Leah's six sons and one daughter. And though she said at Joseph's birth, "May Yahweh add to me another son," we now see Rakhel taking her future abundance into her own hands by consulting the *teraphim*. Like father, like daughter, like husband, like son-in-law.

What Lavan, Yaaqov, and Rakhel all share in common is a desire to experience the Eden-blessing and a willingness to do whatever it takes to get it. In Rakhel's case, she justifies stealing her father's source of divination. It helped him identify Yaaqov as the source of blessing, after all. Perhaps it could do the same for her.

Reflection Question

Based on other hints in the surrounding stories, why might Rakhel have stolen the household gods?

Session 20: Jacob and Laban Make a Covenant

Key Takeaways

- Yaaqov and Lavan are on a path of mutual destruction, but, instead of another round of wronging each other, they choose to make peace through a covenant.
- A covenant is not the Eden ideal; it's how two parties fortify a relationship in a world where at least one party can't be fully trusted.
- The prophet Jeremiah gives us a glimpse of God's heart for a "new covenant," where the stipulations of a covenant are replaced by truly knowing God.

Yaaqov's Exile, From Beginning to End

43 **And Lavan replied and said to Yaaqov** ,
"The daughters are **my daughters** (הבנות בנתי) ,
and the sons are **my sons** (הבנים בני) ,
and the flocks are **my flocks** ,
and all that you see is **mine** .
But what can I do this day to these **my daughters** (לבנותי)
or to their **sons** (לבניהן) whom they have borne?
44 So now come, let us make a **covenant** , **I and you** ,
and let it be a **witness between me and you**."

45 **And Yaaqov** took **a stone** ,
and **he set it up** (וירימה) **as a pillar** .
46 And Yaaqov said to **his brothers** ,
"Gather **stones**."
And they took **stones** and made a **heap** ,
and they ate there by the **heap** .

47 And Lavan called it, "**Jegar** - **sahadutha** " [= Aram. "**Pile of Witness** "],
and Yaaqov called it, **Gal 'ed** " [= Heb. "**Heap of Witness** "].

48 **And Lavan said** ,
"This **heap** is a **witness between me and between you** this day."
Therefore it was named, "**Gal 'ed** ."
49 Also, "**Mizpah**," (מצפה)

for he said,

“May Yahweh **watch** (יִצֹף) **between me and between you**,
when each man hides from his companion.

50 If you oppress my daughters,
or if you take wives besides my daughters,
no man is with us,
see, Elohim is **witness** **between me and you.**”

51 **And Lavan said to Yaaqov ,**

“Behold this **heap** ,
and behold the **pillar which I have thrown** (יִרִיתִי) **between me and between you.**

52 This **heap** is a **witness** ,
and the **pillar** is a **witness** ,
that I will not pass over to you by this heap,
nor will you pass over to me by this heap, to do evil.

53 The Elohim of Abraham,
and the Elohim of Nahor,
the Elohim of their father,
may they judge **between us.**”

And Yaaqov **swore an oath** by the fear of his father Isaac.

54 And Yaaqov offered a sacrifice on the mountain,
and called **his brothers to eat** bread,
and they ate bread,
and they spent the night on the mountain.

32:1 And Lavan rose early in the morning,
and he kissed **his sons** and **his daughters**
and blessed them.
And Lavan departed and returned to his place.

Genesis 31:43-32:1. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

This scene, which concludes Yaaqov's exile in Lavan's house, has been designed to create a literary frame around the entire exile movement.

Genesis 28:10-22

God Appears to Yaaqov at Beth-el

- **28:12** **God appears** **“in a dream”** **during the night**
- **28:13** **God appears as the “Elohim of Avraham and Yitskhaq, your fathers”**
- **“Look, I am with you”**
- **“I will return you to this land”**
- **28:18** **Yaaqov took a stone** (אֶבֶן) **and set up a standing-pillar** (מַצְבֵּה)

- **28:20** Yaaqov vows a vow (נדר) to be loyal to Yahweh

Genesis 29:1-30:43

Yaaqov's Exile in Lavan's house

Genesis 31:1-32:1

- **31:1-16 God Appears to Yaaqov in Exile**
 - **31:10** God appears "in a dream"
 - "Return to the land of your fathers and your birth-family "
 - "and I will be with you"
 - "return to the land of your birth-family "
- **31:17-42 Lavan Chases after Yaaqov**
- **31:43-32:1 Yaaqov and Lavan Make a Covenant of Peace**
 - **31:45** Yaaqov took a stone (אבן) and set up a standing-pillar
 - **31:53** Yaaqov swears an oath (שבוע) to keep his promise to Lavan
 - **31:53** Yaaqov swears by "the Elohim of Nahor, Avraham, and Yitskhaq"

Genesis 28:10-32:1. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

The motifs that appear in Yaaqov's Bethel dream (which begins the story of Yaaqov's exile) are split up and distributed among the first and the last units of the final scene of Yaaqov's exile. This type of design structure is intentional, as an effort to show how God's promises to Yaaqov at Bethel are being fulfilled, but in a surprising way.

- Yaaqov needs to fulfill his vow to Yahweh. In Genesis 31:1-16, he makes a commitment to do so.
- But Yaaqov has also gotten enmeshed in a complicated web of deception with Lavan. In order to fulfill his vow to Yahweh, he must also resolve his 20-year dispute with Lavan.
- And the way that Yaaqov makes peace with Lavan imitates the way he is going to make peace with *Elohim*, through a covenant of peace.

Brothers Make Peace Through a Covenant

This is the final scene of the Yaaqov and Lavan story. The entire story has created a deep tension between the two relatives. Yaaqov the deceiver has been counter-deceived by his uncle and taken advantage of in multiple ways. Yaaqov has returned the favor, and it's not at all clear how this escalating conflict is going to be resolved.

But in this scene, where things could have become violent, God intervenes on behalf of Yaaqov the deceiver and confronts Lavan the counter-deceiver. This taps into a whole network of earlier narrative patterns that culminate in peacemaking covenants.

Sibling Rivalry	Escalating Conflict	Violent De-creation / Re-creation Through Covenant
Cain and Abel	Lemek's 7x10 violence	Gen. 9:11-15 Flood of judgment / Covenant of peace This is the sign of the covenant which I am giving between me and between you and between every living creature that is with you, for everlasting generations. I have set my bow in the cloud, and it will be for a sign of a covenant between me and between the land ... and never again will the waters become a flood to ruin all flesh.
Sarah and Hagar	Sarah's hostility and exile of Hagar	Gen. 17:10-14 Judgment on Abraham's genitals / Covenant of peace This is my covenant that y'all will keep, between me and between y'all, and between your seed after you: circumcise for yourselves every male. And y'all will circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that will be as a sign of the covenant, between me and between y'all. ... And a foreskinned male that is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person will be cut off from his people, he has violated my covenant.
Abraham and Abimelech	Dispute over a well	Gen. 21:27-32 Sacrificial animals / Covenant of peace And Avraham took sheep and oxen, and he gave to Avimelek, and the two of them cut a covenant. And Avraham set up seven female lambs of the flock alone, and Avimelek said to Avraham, "What are these seven female lambs that you have set up alone?" And he said, "Because the seven female lambs you will take from my hand, so that it will become a witness on my behalf, that I dug this well." For this reason, one calls that place Beer-Sheva (= "Well of Seven"), because there the two of them swore an oath and they cut a covenant at Beer-Sheva.
Yitskhaq and Abimelech	Disputes over many wells	Gen. 26:28-31 Covenant of peace "Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, that you will not do bad to us, just as we have not touched you and we have done to you nothing but good and we have sent you away in peace.

Sibling Rivalry and Covenant Peace. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Sibling Rivalry	Escalating Conflict	Violent De-creation / Re-creation Through Covenant
		You are now the one blessed by Yahweh.” And he made them a drink-feast, and they ate and drank . And they got up in the morning and they swore oaths, each with his brother , and Yitskhaq sent them away, and they went from him in peace.
Yaaqov and Lavan	Deceptions and counter-deceptions	Gen. 31:44, 52-54 Covenant of peace “So now, come, let us cut a covenant, I and you , and let it be a witness between me and between you .” ... “This heap is a witness, and the standing-stone is a witness, that I will not cross by this heap over to you, and you will not cross by this heap and this pillar to do bad. ...” So Yaaqov swore an oath by the fear of his father Yitskhaq. And Yaaqov sacrificed a sacrificial-offering on the mountain, and called his his brothers to eat bread, and they ate bread , and they stayed the night on the mountain.
<i>Sibling Rivalry and Covenant Peace. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).</i>		

These developing patterns establish the importance of the covenant, a formal means of addressing conflict so that peace can be initiated.

In each of these cases, the conflict begins between rivals. Either the chosen or the non-chosen begins a cycle of conflict that escalates and is only brought to an end through the making of a covenant.

Yaaqov's Conflicts, Past and Future

The entire covenant-making scene with Lavan seems so unlikely that it creates hope for the reader. Perhaps Yaaqov's unresolved conflict with Esau can also be healed in a similar way to his rivalry with Lavan.

Reflection Question

What is the purpose of a covenant?



Module 5: Jacob's Return From Exile

SESSIONS 21-25

Jacob is finally ready to face the brother he betrayed. Will these two reconcile or will violence once again fill the land?

Session 21: Jacob Builds an Ark

Key Takeaways

- Yaaqov encounters the divine both as he leaves and as he returns to the land of Canaan, echoing the spiritual guardians at the entrance to the garden of Eden.
- Hyperlinks to the flood narrative portray Yaaqov as building his own ark to protect him from the flood of his brother's anger.
- Repeated vocabulary can connect to a distant story, like the flood in this case, or it can set us up for what's coming next.

Yaaqov's Return from Exile



Genesis 32:1-37:1. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

In this final section of the Yaaqov story, he returns to the land to face his brother Esau. He reconciled with Lavan, which gives us hope he can do the same with Esau. But can he be certain? Once again, Yaaqov is thrust into circumstances that will test his trust in Yahweh, who, despite Yaaqov's consistent scheming, has remained committed to his deceitful chosen one. This section of the Yaaqov story is organized into three larger literary units ([Gen. 32:1-33:17](#), [33:18-34:31](#), [35:1-37:1](#)), and each of these has three sub-units (and each of those is made up of three sub-units). The important larger-scale relationships between these three parts illuminate some obscure elements in each.

The Esau/Yaaqov conflict forms the outer frame around the three larger literary units. [Genesis 32:1-11](#) and [Genesis 33:1-17](#) frame the first sub-unit. [Genesis 32:1-11](#) and [Genesis 36:1-37:1](#) frame the entire section.

The smaller stories of Yaaqov having vivid encounters with Yahweh at Peniel ([Gen. 32:23-33](#)) and then at Bethel ([Gen. 35:1-15](#)) form an important inclusion around the center unit, and they also link back to the first Bethel vision ([Gen. 28:10-22](#)) and to Yaaqov's birth narrative where he receives his first name ([Gen. 25:19-34](#)).

In the center of this large section is a contrast unit. While Yaaqov makes peace with Esau and receives his new identity as "Israel" in the outer sections, Yaaqov's sons do just the opposite with the Canaanites. In the center section ([Gen. 33:18-34:31](#)), the sons of Yaaqov are horrified when a Canaanite rapes their sister Dinah. But

instead of seeking justice, they get revenge, and use the covenant sign of circumcision as a ruse to murder the men of an entire town. The sons are not only repeating the sins of their father, they are escalating them to the next level.

This is a sobering section. Yaaqov's return is a kind of celebration, but a muted one at best. His reconciliation with Esau seems only half-hearted, and Yaaqov walks away from the whole affair wounded by God. His sons intensify his past sins, spreading violence in the land, and Yaaqov loses both his favored wife and his father. Yaaqov's sins have caught up with him again, leaving him bereaved and endangered in the land of Canaan. This is all a set-up for the final literary movement of Genesis (Genesis 37-50), where the sins of the fathers come to a head in the ultimate story of sibling rivalry and exile.

Yaaqov and Esau Unite

Genesis 32:2-22

Yaaqov Encounters “Messengers of *Elohim*” at Border Crossing

- **32:2** “This is the camp of Elohim”; “He named the place ‘Two-Camps’ (Heb. *makhanayim* / מחנים)”
- **32:13, 18** Yaaqov sends his flocks ahead as an “offering” (Heb. *minkhah* / מנחה)
- **32:19-21** Yaaqov divides up his flocks and families into 3 groups, himself at the back

Genesis 32:23-33

Yaaqov’s Encounter With the Divine-Human at the Jabbok

- **32:30** “I have seen Elohim face to face!”

Genesis 33:1-17

Yaaqov Encounters Esau

- **33:1-3** Yaaqov sends his families ahead in 3 groups, with himself at the front
- **33:10** “I see your face, as one sees the face of Elohim!”
- **33:10** Yaaqov urges Esau to receive his flocks as an “offering” (Heb. *minkhah* / מנחה)

Genesis 32:2-33:17. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

This first part focuses on the reunion of Yaaqov and Esau, and the story unfolds in three units.

- Unit 1 (Gen. 32:2-22): Yaaqov encounters the divine presence as he enters the land, and then he sends for Esau and prepares his entire camp for the meeting. Even though his experience meeting divine messengers tells him that God is present, Yaaqov arranges an elaborate self-protective “offering” by sending his family ahead and staying at the very back. This entire scene shows Yaaqov back at his old ways, making his own scheme to secure his own safety.
- Unit 2 (Gen. 32:23-33): God’s response to Yaaqov’s newest scheme is, in essence, to say “enough is enough.” God shows up personally to pick a fight with Yaaqov, to wound him and give him a new name,

“Struggles With God.” But Yaaqov, tenacious as ever, proves to be a skilled wrestler, and he manages to wrestle a blessing out of the man, even though he walks away permanently wounded.

- Unit 3 (Gen. 33:1-17): The nighttime wrestling match changes Yaaqov, as he now makes himself vulnerable to Esau by going in front of his family. He recognizes that meeting Esau is like meeting Yahweh because it forces him to face his failures. Esau, it turns out, is more generous and forgiving than Yaaqov deserves or could have anticipated. And this becomes an image for Yaaqov's wrestling match with divine and human antagonists.

A crucial motif in this section is the wordplay connection between the Hebrew words “camp” and “offering.”

- Camp = Hebrew מחנה / *makhaneh*
- Offering = Hebrew מנחה / *minkhah*

Yaaqov's visit to “Two-Camps” has a double meaning.

1. “Two camps” is a symbol of God's promise to be with him because the divine and human camps overlap.
2. “Two camps” becomes a symbol of Yaaqov's lack of trust because he divides up his camp into many as a self-protective strategy to hedge against Esau's potential violence.

Yaaqov takes his two camps and divides them into many parts to send ahead as an “offering” to make up for his past wrongs against Esau.

Yaaqov's *minkhah* is made up of his divided *makhaneh* and is an expression of his lack of trust that God is really with him in his *makhanot*!

Genesis 32:1-22 — Yaaqov Sends for Esau

Genesis 32:1-8

Yaaqov Meets Elohim, Sends Messenger To Meet Esau

A - **32:1-2** Yaaqov meets **divine messengers** : “Two-Camps”

B - **32:3-6** Yaaqov sends his **messengers to Esau** ; messengers return, Esau coming with 400 men!

A' - **32:7-8** Yaaqov afraid and divides his people into **two camps**

Genesis 32:9-12

Yaaqov's Prayer for Protection

A - **32:9** Elohim who said **“I will do good to you”**

B - **32:10-11** You have made me into **two camps** ; deliver me!

A' - **32:12** Elohim, you said, **“I will do good to you”**

Genesis 32:13-22

Yaaqov's Scheme To Protect Himself

A - **32:13-16** Yaaqov arranges the animal **offering** for Esau

B - **32:17-18** Yaaqov arranges the three-part camp + the message
A' - **32:19-21** Yaaqov plans to appease Esau with his **offering**

Genesis 32:1-22. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

31:55 And Lavan went and returned to his place.

32:1 And Yaaqov, he went on his way,
and the **messengers** of **Elohim** encountered him,

² and Yaaqov said when he saw them,

“This is the **camp** of **Elohim**!”

And he called the name of that place **Makhanayim [= “Two-Camps”]**.

³ And Yaaqov sent **messengers** **before his face**

to his brother Esau

in the land of **Seir**,

the field of **Edom**.

⁴ **And he commanded them saying,**

“Thus you shall say to my lord Esau:

‘Thus says your servant Yaaqov,

“I was a migrant with Lavan,

and stayed until now;

⁵ I have **oxen and donkeys, flocks and male and female servants;**

and I have sent to tell my lord,

that I may find favor in your sight.””

⁶ And the **messengers** returned to Yaaqov, saying,

“We came to **your brother Esau**,

and also he is coming to meet you,

and four hundred men are with him!”

⁷ And **Yaaqov was afraid, very much**,

and he was distressed;

and he divided the people who were with him,

and the flocks and the herds and the camels,

into **two camps**;

⁸ and he said,

“**If Esau comes** to the one **camp** **and strikes it**,

then the **camp** which remains will escape.”

Genesis 32:1-8. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

⁹ And Yaaqov said,

“ **Elohim** of my father Abraham,

and **Elohim** of my father Isaac,

Yahweh who said to me,

‘Return to your land and to your birth-family,

and I will do good to you,’

¹⁰ I am too small for all of the loyal love and faithfulness

that you have done to your servant,

for with my staff I crossed this Jordan,

and now I have become **two camps** .

¹¹ Deliver me, please,

from the hand of **my brother**,

from the hand of **Esau**;

for **I am afraid of him**,

lest he come and strike me, the mothers with the children.

¹² **For you said**,

‘I will surely do good to you

and I will make your seed as the sand of the sea,

which cannot be counted because of its greatness.’”

Genesis 32:9-12. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Yaaqov's Encounter with Divine Messengers

The apparently random story of Yaaqov's camp and *Elohim*'s camp is located here at Yaaqov's transition between exile and return. When Yaaqov left the land, he encountered the divine presence, by himself, at Bethel (Gen. 28:10-22). And now, as he returns back to the land, he encounters Yahweh again, this time in the form of divine messengers.

Genesis 28:10-22

- Yaaqov meets “divine messengers” (מלאכי אלהים) at the border of the land
- “And he said, ‘This is the house of El!’”
- “And he called the name of the place, ‘House of El.’”

Genesis 29-31

- Yaaqov’s exile in Lavan’s house

Genesis 32:2-3

- Yaaqov meets “divine messengers” (מלאכי אלהים) at the border of the land
- “And he said, ‘This is the camp of Elohim’”
- “And he called the name of the place ‘Two-Camps’”

Genesis 28:10-32:3. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Yaaqov's Prayer of Faith or Lack Thereof?

The story of God’s presence with Yaaqov is a tangible expression of God’s promise to be “with” Yaaqov.

Understandably, Yaaqov is afraid. Esau is coming with 400 men! And so we hear what seems to be a heartfelt prayer of panic and distress. Yaaqov acknowledges God’s promise to Yaaqov to have many descendants (although it was to Abraham that God worded the promise this way, not to Yaaqov; see [Gen. 22:17](#)).

Yaaqov attributes his wealth and possessions to Yahweh’s “loyal love and faithfulness.” This important word pair will become a standard expression in describing Yahweh’s character in [Exodus 34:6-7](#). But the phrase has appeared one time before this, in an important parallel story about Abraham’s servant who was on his way to Lavan’s house to look for a wife for Yitskhaq.

Genesis 24:27 Instructor’s Translation

He said, “Blessed be Yahweh, **the Elohim of my master Abraham**, who has not forsaken **his loyal love and faithfulness** toward my master; as for me, Yahweh has guided me in the way to the house of my master’s brothers.”

Genesis 32:9-10 Instructor’s Translation

⁹ Yaaqov said, **“O Elohim of my father Abraham and Elohim of my father Yitskhaq ...** ¹⁰ I am unworthy of all **the loyal love and faithfulness** which you have shown to your servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies.”

In both stories, a member of Abraham’s house is traveling the same road between Canaan and Kharan. And in both stories, the future of the family of Abraham is at stake. In both cases, it is only Yahweh’s loyal love that will keep the chosen seed alive.

13 **So he spent the night there .**

And he took from what came into his hand as an **offering** to **Esau his brother**:

14 two hundred female goats¹
and twenty male goats,²

two hundred ewe-lambs,³
and twenty rams,⁴

15 thirty nursing camels⁵
and their colts,⁶

forty cows⁷
and ten bulls,⁸

twenty female donkeys⁹
and ten male donkeys.¹⁰

16 **And he gave** into the hand of his servants
each herd by itself,

and said to his servants,

"Pass on before my face,
and put a **resting** space between herds."

17 **And he commanded the first , saying,**

"When **my brother Esau** encounters you and asks you, saying,
'To whom do you belong,
and where are you going,
and to whom do these **before your face** belong?'

18 **and you shall say,**

'They belong to your servant, to Yaaqov;
it is an **offering** sent to my lord, to **Esau**.
And behold, he also is behind us.'"

19 **And he commanded also the second ,**

and also the third ,

and also all those who followed the herds, **saying,**

"According to this word you shall speak to **Esau** when you find him,

20 **and you will say,**

'Behold, your servant Yaaqov also is behind us.'"

For he said,

"I will cover-over **his face** with the **offering** that goes **before my face**
and afterward **I will see his face** ;
perhaps **he will lift up my face** ."

21 And the **offering** passed on **before his face** ,
and he himself spent that night in the **camp** .

Yaaqov's Peace Offering or Self-Protective Scheme?

The story about Yaaqov preparing an offering for Esau could be taken a couple ways.

1. It could be that he is genuinely sorry and offers a huge gift to make up for his huge deception 20 years ago. The long ten-fold list of animals describes an enormous amount of wealth.
2. It could be an elaborate self-protective scheme meant to pacify his brother's anger and butter him up before seeing Yaaqov face to face. Recall that Yaaqov's fear, expressed back in [Genesis 32:9-12](#) is that "Esau may come ... and strike the camp!" Yaaqov puts his entire camp ahead of himself, placing his wives, children, slaves, and animals in harm's way. While he does say the purpose of the offering is to "cover-over" his face, that is, appease his anger with a valuable gift, it's curious that Yaaqov puts himself far behind instead of out front. The fact that Yaaqov places himself behind the camp is twice emphasized, which draws our attention to this detail.

"The Greater One Will Serve the Smaller One"

The birth oracle intimated that the "greater" would serve the "younger" ([Gen. 25:23](#)). But the story that follows shows the exact opposite coming to pass.

The younger Yaaqov (at the instigation of his mother) schemes a way to get his own blessing instead of waiting for God to grant it in due time. And he pays dearly for these deceptions. Esau's anger exiles Yaaqov to Lavan's house, where he is deceived in return and becomes a "servant" to Lavan (contrary to the birth oracle). He leaves Lavan's house when he "sees his face" has changed (see [Gen. 31:2, 5](#)) and then he flees (just as he fled from Esau).

When Yaaqov returns, he schemes his way back into Esau's favor only to bow to him and declare that he is Esau's servant (see [Gen. 32:19](#)). He says that seeing Esau's face is like seeing the face of God, which is more merciful to him in his humiliation and helplessness than he anticipated.

Genesis 25:23 NASB

The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; and two peoples will be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and **the greater** shall **serve** the younger."

Genesis 29:18-20 NASB

¹⁸ Now Jacob loved Rachel, so he said, "I will **serve** you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." ...
²⁰ So Jacob **served** seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her.

Genesis 32:4 NASB

He also commanded them saying, "Thus you shall say to **my master Esau** : 'Thus says **your servant** Jacob, "I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now;'"

Ironically, both of these “greater ones” (Esau and Lavan) end up having the “younger” Yaaqov as their servant, and he sees both of their faces, one unfavorable and the other gracious, as though seeing the face of God.

In a strange paradox, it is precisely by becoming a suffering servant to the nations (Esau the father of Edom, Lavan the Aramean) that Yaaqov finally becomes a vehicle of God’s peace and blessing to both of them.

And this idea, the suffering of Yaaqov the servant of God that brings blessing to others, this is what the following strange story is all about.

Reflection Question

How do you interpret Yaaqov’s actions as he prepares to meet his brother?

Session 22: God Wrestles With Jacob

Key Takeaways

- The letters of Yaaqov's name are littered throughout the narrative where his name is changed.
- The judgment that Yaaqov faces, being wounded in his striving against God, comes to its ultimate fulfillment in the suffering of the Messiah on our behalf.
- The biblical authors depict the true-to-life experience of the tension between God's sovereignty and human free will, but they do not attempt to resolve the tension for us.

God Wrestles With Yaaqov

22 And **he arose** (ויקם) **in the night** ,
and he took his two wives and his two female slaves and his eleven children
and he **crossed** (יעבר) the **Yabbok** (יבק) .

23 **And he took** them
and he made them **cross** (יעבר) the stream,
and he made **cross** (יעבר) all that belonged to him.

24 And **Yaaqov** (יעקב) was left alone

and a **man** (איש) **wrestled** (יאבק) with him until the **rising of dawn** (עלות השחר).

25 And he saw that he could not **prevail** (יכול) him
and he touched (ויגע) **the hollow of his thigh** (כף ירכו)
and it was **jerked away** (יקע) , **the hollow of his thigh** (כף ירך) of **Yaaqov** (יעקב)
as he **wrestled** (בהאבקו) with him.

26 And he said,
"Send me away,
for (כי) **the sun has gone up** (עלה השחר) !"

And he said,
"I will not send you away,
unless (כי אם) you **bless** (ברך) me!"

27 And he said to him, "What is **your name** (מה) + (שמך)?"

And he said, " **Yaaqov** (יעקב) ."

28 And he said,
"Not **Yaaqov** (יעקב) will **your name** (שם) be spoken any more,

rather (כי אם) **Yisrael** (ישראל)
for (כי) you have struggled/ruled (שרה) with **God and humans** (אלהים) + (איש),
 and you have **prevailed** (יכול)."

²⁹ And **Yaaqov** requested, "Tell me, please, **your name**!" (שם)

And he said, "Why (למה) do you request **my name** (שם)?"

And he **blessed** (ברך) him there (שם).

³⁰ And Yaaqov called **the name** (שם) of the place **Peniel**,

for (כי) "I have seen **God face** to **face** and my life was delivered."

³¹ And **the sun rose** (ויזרח השמש),

as he **crossed** (עבר) at **Penuel**,

and he limped (צלע) on **his thigh** (ירכו).

³² Therefore, the sons of Israel do not eat **the sinew of the hip-nerve** (גיד הנשה)

which is on **the hollow of the thigh** (כף ירך) to this very day,

for (כי) he touched (נגע) **the hollow of the thigh** (כף ירך) of **Yaaqov** (יעקב) by **the sinew of the hip-nerve** (גיד הנשה).

Genesis 32:22-32. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

In the translation above, the pervasive wordplays on the letters of Yaaqov's name are displayed in red font. The narrative revolves around the change of Yaaqov's name to Yisrael, and the focus on his name is embedded into the very wording of the story itself.

Yaaqov Wrestles With Elohim, Esau, and Lavan

There is a deliberate analogy drawn between Yaaqov's meeting and confrontation with Lavan in chapter 31 and his confrontation and meeting with Esau in chapters 32-33. Both units consist of seven clearly marked scenes, and they match verbally and thematically. [Adapted from Gordon Wenham, [Genesis 16-50](#), p. 287-88]

	Genesis 31 Yaaqov and Lavan	Genesis 32-33: Yaaqov and Esau
Scene 1	Gen. 31:1-3 Instructions to leave	Gen. 32:3-6 Planning to meet Esau
Scene 2	Gen. 31:4-18 Preparations to leave "He lifted up his sons, and his wives upon camels ... and his flock (מקנה) and all his possessions which he possessed, flock and possessions"	Gen. 32:7-21 Preparations to meet Esau "And he took ... an offering (מנחה) for Esau: she-goats, he-goats, sheep, rams, camels, cows, bulls, she-donkeys, he-donkeys."
Scene 3	Gen. 31:17-21 Departure and crossing of Euphrates	Gen. 32:22-23 Crossing of Yabbok

Yaaqov Wrestles Elohim, Esau, and Lavan. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Genesis 31 Yaaqov and Lavan		Genesis 32-33: Yaaqov and Esau
	"And he arose (וַיָּקָם) and he took his sons, and his wives ... and he fled and all who were with him (וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ), and he crossed (וַיַּעְבֵּר) the river and he set his face (פָּנָיו) to Mount Gilead."	"And he arose (וַיָּקָם) and he took his two wives and two maidservants and his eleven sons, and he crossed (וַיַּעְבֵּר) the crossing of the Yabbok. ... and he made all who were with him (אֶת אֲשֶׁר לוֹ) cross."
Scene 4	Gen. 31:22-24 Pursuit by Lavan Gen. 31:23 "and he clung (וַיִּדְבֶּק) to him"	Gen. 32:24-32 Struggle with the man Gen. 32:24 "and he struggled (וַיִּאָבֵק) with him"
Scene 5	Gen. 31:25-54 Confrontation with Lavan	Gen. 33:1-15 Confrontation with Esau
Scene 6	Gen. 31:55-32:1a Parting of Lavan and Yaaqov "And Lavan went and returned (וַיָּלֶךְ וַיָּשָׁב) to his place, and Yaaqov went to his path (לְדַרְכּוֹ)."	Gen. 33:16-17 Parting of Esau and Yaaqov "and Esau returned (וַיָּשָׁב) to his path (לְדַרְכּוֹ) ... and Yaaqov went (וַיָּבֹא) to Sukkoth."
Scene 7	Gen. 32:1-2 Conclusion/Preview Yaaqov comes to the camp of Elohim	Gen. 33:18-20 Conclusion/Preview Yaaqov camped by the city
Yaaqov Wrestles Elohim, Esau, and Lavan. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).		

At the center of these two stories is the struggle of Yaaqov with the "man" in the nighttime, and Yaaqov's renaming, which revolves around his "wrestling with God and with men (i.e., Lavan and Esau) and you overcame (וַתִּגְבַּל)" (([Gen. 32:29](#))).

This nighttime story becomes a thematic parable of the entire Yaaqov cycle: His struggle with humans to gain a blessing for himself parallels his struggle with God to create his own blessing. This theme is also an image of the Genesis scroll's entire plot conflict about humanity's attempt to create its own Eden blessing after being expelled from the garden.

"The night attack, the life and death struggle, and finally the unexpected conclusion, the gracious blessing and bestowal of a new name, that is ... God's answer to the deceiver Jacob ... whereby God's sovereignty and faithfulness to his promise despite all human unworthiness is demonstrated. Jacob is no longer the strong victorious controller of the divine but Israel who is totally dependent on God's grace, and now lame."

Wenham, Gordon J. (1998). [Genesis 16–50, vol. 2](#). Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, Incorporated. 294.

God Picks a Fight and Wounds His Chosen One

The identity of the man (Heb. אִישׁ) is left for the reader to ponder in light of narratives elsewhere in the Genesis scroll and in light of other details within this story.

- When Yahweh appeared to Abraham by his tent in Mamre, it was in the form of a man (אִישׁ, see [Gen. 18:1-3](#)).
- Another mysterious man (אִישׁ) will guide Joseph to his brothers ([Gen. 37:15](#)), which Joseph later sees as an expression of divine guidance (“God sent me here,” [Gen. 45:5](#)).
- The man who wrestles with Yaaqov can offer Yahweh’s blessing ([32:29](#)).
- Yaaqov describes the experience as “seeing *Elohim* face to face!” (see [32:30](#)).

The fact that the man is Yahweh in human form only makes the story more puzzling.

- How is it that God cannot “prevail” over Yaaqov?
- And why would God have to strike Yaaqov in the crotch to wound him?

These details of the story are an intentional riddle meant to offer a commentary on the surrounding stories.

God Wrestles With Yaaqov

God spoke a word of blessing and choice over Yaaqov before he was born. And yet, from his first moments, Yaaqov has been seizing for the position of the firstborn blessing. This “heel grabbing” continued in Rivqah and Yaaqov's deception, in Yaaqov's deception of Lavan, and now in his attempt to bribe forgiveness from Esau.

At each point, God allows Yaaqov's deceit to turn back upon him, bringing more pain and isolation. And yet Yaaqov never seems to learn. He just repeats his old ways.

And so God gets personally involved and wounds Yaaqov so thoroughly he cannot recover.

This story is a vivid image of God’s journey with humanity as a whole and with his chosen people in particular. God’s purpose is to bless, and that purpose keeps bumping up against humanity’s inability to trust God’s generous intentions. Instead, Yaaqov keeps scheming as if the ultimate blessing is up to him.

Why a Strike to the Crotch?

When Abraham was concerned about the future of his family, he made his servant swear an oath by “placing your hand under my thigh (תחת ירכי, see [Gen. 24:2](#).) This is precisely the region of Yaaqov's crotch struck by the divine man. It’s a strike to the reproductive region, and while Benjamin is yet to be born (see [Gen. 35](#)), it’s not impossible that Rakhel is already pregnant.

God responded to Abraham and Sarah's sin against Hagar with judgement and mercy through circumcision. In a similar way, God responds harshly by wounding Yaaqov in the same area. Yaaqov will walk with a limp, forever wounded.

Suffering: The Way to Blessing

Both of these details point in the same direction: God's ultimate desire is to partner with humans, who are currently represented by the family of Abraham. But what if his chosen people are so recalcitrant that they continually become a source of curse among the nations instead of being a blessing? God reaches a point where the only option is to wound his chosen one, striking him in order to make him an able conduit of blessing to others.

This story seems to echo the equally dense riddle spoken by Yahweh to the snake in Genesis 3:15.

Genesis 3:15 Instructor's Translation

And I will set hostility between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.

Yaaqov was born "grabbing the heel" of his brother, which began a cascade of painful consequences that eventually come back on Yaaqov's head. It's as if his own failures become the way his own heel is struck in return.

Yaaqov suffers as a result of his own sin against others, and this, it appears, is the way that God's purpose to bless comes about (see [Gen. 50:20](#))!

From Yaaqov to Israel

The name change is hugely significant. The meaning of Yaaqov's entire life up to this point is packed into this little narrative and into this new name.

- Yaaqov = "heel-er," i.e., "heel-grabber, trickster"
- Yisrael = "he struggles with El"

"Names throughout Scripture are significant, but changes of name in midlife are specially so (cf. Abram/Abraham and Sarai/Sarah in [17:5](#), [15](#)). Here Jacob's new name was to become the nation's name, and it is fraught with significance. Israel, 'God fights or rules,' is here reinterpreted as a reference to Jacob's struggle with God. Yet this reinterpretation captures the paradox of Jacob's struggle precisely. For while Jacob struggled with God, it was God who allowed Jacob to triumph in the fight ... Jacob's experience at the Yabbok, wrestling with God and yet surviving, was in later times seen as prefiguring the national experience ([Hos. 12:5](#)). Running through the psalms of national lament there is a similar conviction that the nation's trials are heaven-sent; yet only from heaven can they look for deliverance (e.g., [Ps. 74](#), [79](#), [80](#), [83](#)). So this story of Jacob's struggle with God summed up for Israel their national destiny. Among all their trials and perplexities in which God seemed to be fighting against them, he was ultimately on their side; indeed, he would triumph, and in his victory, Israel would triumph too ..."

Wenham, Gordon J. (1998). [Genesis 16–50, vol. 2](#). Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, Incorporated. 302-303.

Links With Earlier Narrative Patterns in the Genesis Scroll

Genesis 32-33 and the Eden Narrative

The entire sequence of [Genesis 32-33](#) is overlaid with verbal references back to the core patterns of Genesis 1-11.

Yaaqov's Nighttime Meeting With Yahweh	Adam's Nighttime Meeting With Yahweh
Gen. 32:22 And [Yaaqov] arose on that night	Gen. 2:21a And Yahweh caused a deep sleep to fall upon the human
Gen. 32:24 And Yaaqov was left alone (לבדו)	Gen. 2:18 And Yahweh God said, "Not good is the human being alone (לבדו)"
Gen. 32:25 And [the divine man] saw that he could not overcome him, and he touched the socket of his thigh (ירכו) Gen. 32:31 ... and [Yaaqov] limped (צלע) upon his thigh	Gen. 2:21b-22 and [Yahweh] took one from his sides (צלע) ... And Yahweh built the side (צלע) into a woman
Yaaqov Eden Narrative Hyperlinks. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

Both narratives portray a lone human who is unable to fulfill the purpose of God by themselves. So God comes in a mysterious, vivid way and performs a surprise "procedure" that opens up the pathway to divine blessing. In both stories, the character transitions from a place of inability and moves into a place of divine enablement.

- In the human's case, the one is divided into two, opening up the possibility for the two to become one and produce many descendants.
- In Yaaqov's case, the one is struck in his reproductive organs, seeming closing off the possibility for future descendants. But this humiliating and wounding experience is what shifts Yaaqov into a new mindset, displayed in the next story.

Genesis 32-33 and the Cain and Abel Narrative

Yaaqov and Esau	Cain and Abel
Gen. 33:10 "Please now, if I find favor in your eyes, then you will take my offering (מנחה) from my hand ..."	Gen. 4:3-6 Two brothers bring an offering (מנחה), one is favored and one is not, resulting in anger and sibling rivalry
Yaaqov and Cain & Abel Narrative Hyperlinks. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

Yaaqov and Esau

Cain and Abel

Gen. 32:12 “And you said, ‘I will surely do good (היטב איטיב) to you and make your seed like the sand of the sea.’”

Gen. 4:7 “If you do good (תיטיב) there will be exaltation; and if you don’t do good (לא תיטיב) ...”

Gen. 32:11 “Deliver me from the hand of my brother, Esau ... so that he doesn’t come and strike me.”

Gen. 4:8 “And while they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother and he murdered him.”

Yaaqov and Cain & Abel Narrative Hyperlinks. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

The sibling rivalry theme of Cain and Abel has reached its culmination in the Yaaqov and Esau story. It deliberately comes to its resolution by activating the vocabulary of the story from [Genesis 4](#). However, instead of the older brother murdering the younger, Esau is surprisingly generous and forgives.

Genesis 32-33 and the Flood Narrative

Genesis 6:7, 13 NASB

⁷ And Yahweh said, “I will wipe away humanity that I created from the face of the ground, from humanity to animals to creeping things and to birds of the skies, for I consoled myself (נחם) that I have made them” ...

¹³ And *Elohim* said to Noah, “The end (קץ) of all flesh has come before me, because the land is filled with violence because of them, and behold, I am going to ruin them with land.”

Genesis 8:21 NASB

And Yahweh smelled the soothing smell; and Yahweh said to his heart (לבו), “I will never again curse the ground on account of humanity, because the purpose of the heart of humanity is bad from his youth; and I will never again strike all life, as I just did.”

Genesis 27

Genesis 32-33

Genesis 6-8

Gen. 27:41 “And Esau held a grudge against Yaaqov ... and **he said in his heart** (אמר + בלבו), ‘The days of mourning (אבל / הבל) are near, and I will **murder Yaaqov my brother** (הרג + אחי)’”

Gen. 32:7 “And Yaaqov was greatly afraid, **and distress** (ויצר) was to him.”

Gen. 6:5 “And Yahweh saw that multiplied was the badness of humanity in the land, and every **purpose** (יצר) of the plans of **his heart** (לבו) was only bad all the day.”

Yaaqov Flood Narrative Hyperlinks. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Genesis 27	Genesis 32-33	Genesis 6-8
Gen. 27:42 "Behold, Esau your brother is consoling himself (נחם) regarding you, to murder you (הרג)"		Gen. 6:6 "And Yahweh consoled himself (נחם) that he made humanity in the land, and he was pained in his heart (לבו)."
	Gen. 32:5 "I have sent to my lord, to find favor in your eyes (למצא חן בעיניך)"	Gen. 6:8 "But Noah found favor (מצא חן) in the eyes of Yahweh"
	Gen. 32:8 "and if he strikes it (Hiph. נכה) then there will be the camp that remains (נשאר) as one who escapes (פליטה)."	The flood is God's "strike (נכה) on all life" (8:21), but only Noah and family "remains" (ישאר, 7:23)
	Gen. 32:16 "And he said to his servants, 'Cross over before me, and place a space of rest (רוח) between flock and between flock"	Gen. 8:1, 4 God sends out a "breath/wind" (רוח) over the waters which recede so the ark can "rest" (נוח) on the mountain
	Gen. 32:17-20 "And he commanded the first (הראשון) ... and he commanded the second (השני) and also the third (השלישי) ... for he said, ' I will cover his face (כפר) with the offering (מנחה).'" Gen. 33:2 "And he set (וישם) the maidservants and children first (ראשנה), and Leah and her children afterwards (אחרנים), and Rakhel and Joseph afterwards (אחרנים)."	Gen. 6:14-16 "Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood ... you will make it with lowers (תחתיות) , seconds (שנים), and thirds (שלשים)."
Gen. 27:27 "[Yitskhaq] smelled the aroma (וירח ריח) of [Yaaqov's] garments, he blessed	Gen. 33:10 "If I may find favor in your eyes (מצאתי חן בעיניך), then take my offering (מנחה) from	Gen. 8:21 "Yahweh smelled the soothing aroma (וירח יהוה את ריח) and said in his

Genesis 27	Genesis 32-33	Genesis 6-8
him, 'The smell (ריח) of my son ...'"	my hand, for on account of seeing your face as one sees the face of God, then you will accept me favorably (ותרצני)."	heart, 'I will never again curse the ground ...'"
	Word plays on "Noah" (נוח) • "camp" (מחנה) • "offering" (מנחה) • "favor" (חן) • "show favor" (חנן)	Word-plays on "Noah" (נוח) • "rest" (נוח) • "smell a restful smell" (ריח ניחוח) • "favor" (חן)
Yaaqov Flood Narrative Hyperlinks. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).		

In each case, Yaaqov plays the opposite role of Noah, who received divine favor as a gift and built the ark in response to the divine command. Contrast Noah with Yaaqov, who builds his own scheme of blessing and salvation from Esau and keeps trying to engineer his own "favor" (חן) in the eyes of "my lord" (Esau/God, as [Gen. 32:29](#) makes clear).

Yaaqov's three-part division of the people and animals looks conspicuously like the three-part division of the ark's stories.

Notes on flood analogies: Esau coming with anger and wrath is set on analogy with God in the flood, but ironically Esau, it turns out, is not angry. Yaaqov believes that Esau, like God in the flood, is coming to "strike" ([Gen. 32:9](#)), and so he needs to be sent an "offering" ([Gen. 32:14, 19](#); מנחה) in order "that I might appease his face" (אכפרה פניו, [32:21](#)). However, Esau needs no such persuading, and he will gladly receive his humbled brother with joy.

Reflection Question

How does Yaaqov's wrestling with God further develop the portrait of God's chosen one?

Session 23: The Reunion of Jacob and Esau

Key Takeaways

- After his wrestling match with God, Yaaqov, the wounded servant, sacrifices himself on behalf of everything he holds dear.
- Esau's reaction to Yaaqov's return, running to him and embracing him, points forward to Jesus' parable of the loving father embracing his prodigal son.
- Yaaqov recognizes the image of God in Esau's face, moving him to love his brother the way he would love God.

Yaaqov Reconciles With Esau and Offers Up His Life

¹ And Yaaqov lifted his eyes and saw ,
and behold, Esau was coming,
and with him were four hundred men,

and he divided the children
by Leah, and by Rakhel, and by the two servants .

² And he placed the servants and their children first,
and Leah and her children afterwards,
and Rakhel and Joseph afterwards.

³ And he himself passed on before the face of them
and he bowed down to the ground seven times,
until he came near to his brother.

⁴ And Esau ran to meet him
and he embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him,
and they wept.

⁵ And he [Esau] lifted his eyes and saw the women and the children ,
and he said,
“ Who are these with you ?”
And he said,
“The children with whom God has favored (חנן) your servant.”

⁶ And **the servants came near with their children** , and they bowed down.

⁷ And **Leah likewise came near with her children** , and they bowed down;
and **afterwards Joseph and Rakhel came near** , and they bowed down.

⁸ And he said,

“ **What is it to you** , all this **camp (מחנה)** that I have encountered?”

And he said,

“**To find favor (חן) in the eyes of my lord.**”

⁹ And Esau said,

“ **I have much, my brother** ;

let what you have belong to you.”

¹⁰ And Yaaqov said,

“No, please, **if now I have found favor (חן) in your eyes**,
then **take my offering (מנחה)** from my hand,
for this reason:

I have seen your face as one sees the face of God ,

and you have accepted me.

¹¹ Please **take my blessing** which has been brought to you,
because **God has shown favor (חנן) to me**,
and because I have everything .”

And he urged him,
and **he took it**.

Genesis 33:1-17. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

The scene progresses in two parallel panels that create a fascinating comparison and contrast between the two brothers.

- Genesis 33:1-4 focuses on Yaaqov's perception (33:1), his response (33:1b-3) of placing the family members in order of favor, and then placing himself in front of them all as he bows down to his brother. This is a surprise shift from the previous day's plan, where he places all the wives and children up front, even though he knew their lives were at risk. This move to the front shows that Yaaqov has undergone a deep character transformation.
- The surprising twist (33:4) is that Esau runs to be reconciled with his brother, showing affection and love. The inner contrast is between Yaaqov's self-preservation scheme and Esau's generous love.
- Genesis 33:5-8 unfolds with a parallel progression, this time opening with Esau's perception (33:5) and his response of astonishment at how many people and animals there are (33:5b-8).

- Notice how Genesis 33:5b-8 contains the progressive list of wives and children at the center, flanked by two short dialogues between the brothers that portray the family as an expression of God's "favor" that Yaaqov uses to gain "favor" in the eyes of his brother.

The middle sub-unit in Genesis 33:9-11 shows Yaaqov back in his native mode of transactional self-preservation as he attempts to give an "offering" to his brother. However, the concentric design of this unit makes a more subtle point. Notice how Yaaqov calls the animals an offering (מנחה) in 33:10, but then in the matching line he asks his brother to "take" (לקח) "the blessing" (ברכה). Yaaqov's purpose becomes clear; this "gift" is his attempt to undo his actions from chapter 27, where he took (לקח) the blessing (ברכה) from this brother (Gen. 27:36).

This climactic scene sheds light on the previous narrative of Yaaqov at the Jabbok, where he wrestled with the "God-man," received a blessing, and "saw the face of God." Now, faced with his brother from whom he stole the blessing, we see that Yaaqov's struggle with his brother over the blessing is one and the same as his struggle with God to gain the blessing. At the Jabbok, Yaaqov was wounded and humbled, and yet received the blessing after all. So now Yaaqov gives up his struggle to usurp his brother, and he "gives up" the blessing, only to receive it in a new and more powerful way.

Yaaqov, Ever the Schemer

¹² And he said,

"**Let us journey** (נסע) and let us go,
and I will go before you."

¹³ And he said to him,

"**My lord** knows that the **children** are tender
and **the flocks and herds** which are nursing are with me,
and should they drive them one day, all the flocks will die.

¹⁴ Please let **my lord** pass on before **his servant**,

and I will proceed at my leisure,
according to the pace of the **cattle** that are before me
and according to the pace of the **children**,
until I come to my lord at **Seir**."

¹⁵ And Esau said,

"Please let me leave with you some of the people who are with me."

And he said,

"What need is there?

Let me find favor in the eyes of my lord."

¹⁶ And Esau returned that day on his way to **Seir**.

17 **And Yaaqov journeyed** (נסע) to **Sukkoth** [= “Booths”]
and he built for himself a house
and he made **booths** for his livestock;
therefore the name of the place is called **Sukkoth**.

Genesis 33:1-17. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Here we see Yaaqov's evasive and scheming nature re-emerge. While he clearly wants to be reconciled to his brother, we now wonder about his ultimate motives. Perhaps what he really wants is simply to live in the land of his birth and ancestors, and making peace with Esau is a necessary step. Every response of Yaaqov sounds like a lame excuse. Esau wants to live together, but Yaaqov lets the "weakness" of the flocks and children pose the obstacle (much like he placed the animals and children in front of himself as a human shield in [chapter 32](#)).

At the culmination of his excuses, Yaaqov simply lies outright and says he will follow Esau to Seir. He has no intention of doing this, and his actions tell the real story. As soon as Yaaqov and Esau are reunited, Yaaqov tries to get his brother out of his hair and territory. Yaaqov is on a mission to get back into the land and be near his father.

Reflection Question

What does it mean when Yaaqov says to Esau, “I have seen your face as one sees the face of God”? Where else do we see this theme in the Bible?

Session 24: The Oppression of Dinah

Key Takeaways

- Yaaqov's sons begin to repeat his deceptive pattern.
- The Bible depicts the reality of human evil and the apparent absence of God, mirroring our lived experience and forcing us to confront how we ought to respond.

Yaaqov's Sons Among the Nations

This tragic and disturbing story shows how Yaaqov's sons not only repeat their father's deceptive patterns, but escalate them to catastrophic results. In the overall organization of the Yaaqov story, this narrative corresponds to its compositional pair, the story of Yitskhaq's deception of the nations in [Genesis 26](#).

The story has an elegant large-scale design.

Genesis 33:18-20

- Now **Yaaqov came safely to the city of Shechem** ... and he bought the piece of land where he had pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father ... and **he set up an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.**

Genesis 34:1-7

34:1-4

Shechem Rapes Dinah and Seeks To Marry Her

- Hyperlinks to Genesis 2-3 and 6
- **34:2 Shechem's dishonorable action**: "he lay with her and he oppressed her"
- **34:4** Son speaks to father: "Get this little girl for me to marry"

34:5-7

Father Yaaqov's Non-Response vs. Yaakov's Sons' Response of Anger

- **34:5** "Yaaqov heard ... and he kept silent"
- **34:7** "The sons of Yaaqov heard ... and they were grieved and were very angry"

Genesis 34:8-24

34:8-19a

Father Hamor and Son Shechem Propose a Marriage Alliance With Yaaqov's Family

- a - 34:8-12 **Hamor and Shechem's speech: "give us your daughters/take our daughters for wives"**
- b - 34:14-17 Yaaqov's sons' deceptive speech: "we will consent (אוֹת) if you are circumcised like us"
- c - 34:18-19a **Hamor and Shechem consent**

34:19b-24

Father Hamor and Son Shechem Propose a Marriage Alliance to the People of Shechem

- a - 34:21-23 **Hamor and Shechem's speech: "will take/give daughters ... for wives "**
- b - Hamor and Shechem's qualifier: "they will consent (אוֹת) if we are circumcised as they are"
- c - 34:24 **People of Shechem consent**

Genesis 34:25-31

Simeon and Levi Murder the Town of Shechem

- Hyperlinks to Genesis 4 and 6
- Narrative of **Simeon and Levi's dishonorable actions**
- 34:30 Father to sons: "You have brought trouble upon me"
- 34:31 Sons speak to father: "Should he treat our sister as a prostitute?"

Genesis 35:1

- And God said to **Yaaqov, "Arise, go up to Bethel** and dwell there, and **make an altar there to El** , who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."

Genesis 33:18-35:1. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

This story has an important match in Genesis 26 (also in the middle of the first part of the Yaaqov story).

Yitskhaq and the Canaanites (Genesis 26:1-35)

Rivqah is seized by an innocent Canaanite **because of** Yitskhaq's deception

Yaaqov and the Hivites (Genesis 34:1-31)

Dinah is seized by a deceptive Canaanite, **which results in** Simeon and Levi's even worse deception

Yitskhaq, Canaanites, Hivities. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Yitskhaq and the Canaanites (Genesis 26:1-35)	Yaaqov and the Hivites (Genesis 34:1-31)
Gen. 26:10 “One of the people barely laid (כמעט שכב) with your wife and brought guilt (אשם) upon us”	Gen. 34:2 “Shechem saw [Dinah] ... and laid (וישכב) with her and raped her (ויענה)”
Gen. 20 Like father, like son: Yitskhaq lies about Rivqah and replays his father’s same deception of Abimelech	Gen. 34:5 “Yaaqov heard that [Shechem] had defiled (טמא) Dinah”
Gen. 26:10 “ One of the people (אחד העם) barely laid with your wife”	Gen. 34:13 Like father, like son: Simeon and Levi plan “with deception” (במרמה) just as their father Yaaqov acted “with deception” (במרמה) toward Esau (Gen. 27:35)
Yitskhaq calls his wife “sister”	Gen. 34:16 “they will give their daughters to us, and we will take their daughters for ourselves ... and we will become one people (לעם אחד)”
Gen. 26:28-29, 31 Yitskhaq and Abimelech make a covenant (ברית) so that Yitskhaq can depart in peace (בשלום)	Shechem lays with the “sister” of the sons of Yaaqov
Gen. 26:22 “And he named the well Rehoboth (רחבות), and he said, ‘Because Yahweh has made wide (רחב) for us”	Gen. 34:21a Shechem and Hamor to the Shechemites: “Behold these [Hebrew] men are peaceful (שלמים) with us”
	Gen. 34:21b “... and the land is wide (רחבת) of hands before them”
Yitskhaq, Canaanites, Hivities. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

The Rape of Dinah in Shechem

18 And Yaaqov came in peace to **the city** of **Sh'khem** in the land of **Canaan** when he came from Paddan-aram and he camped facing **the city**.

19 And he acquired the portion of **a field** where he had stretched out his tent there, from the hand of **Khamor, father of Sh'khem** for 100 Qesitah,

20 and he set up there an altar, and he called it,

34:1 And **Dinah** went out,
the **daughter of Leah**,
whom she had birthed for **Yaaqov**,
to see **the daughters** of the land.
2 And **Sh'khem** saw her,
and the son of **Khamor the Khivite**
and exalted one of the land,
and **he took** her
and **he laid down with her**,
and he oppressed her.
3 And his being clung to **Dinah**,
daughter of Yaaqov,
and he loved the young woman,
and he spoke to the heart of the young woman.
4 And **Sh'khem** said to **Khamor his father**, saying,
“**Take** for me this girl as a wife.”

5 And **Yaaqov** **heard** that **he had defiled** **Dinah his daughter**,
and **his sons** were with his herds in **the field**,
and **Yaaqov** remained silent until they came.
6 And **Khamor, father of Sh'khem**, came out to **Yaaqov** to speak with him.
7 And **the sons of Yaaqov** came in from **the field** **when they heard**,
and the men were grieved,
and there was hot-anger to them, very much,
because **he had done a despicable act** in Israel,
by laying down with the daughter of Yaaqov,
and such **a thing should not be done**.

Genesis 33:18-34:7. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

The Promise of the Land

Near the end of the Abraham story, he purchases the only piece of land in Canaan that he ever owns: the field with the burial cave of Macpelah (see [Gen. 23](#)). The story focuses on the friendly relationship between Abraham and the Canaanites, who esteem him as one “exalted by *Elohim*” (נשיא אלהים, [Gen. 23:6](#)). They peacefully negotiate a price for the field, and it becomes the down payment of the land promised by God.

Now, near the end of Yaaqov's story, he also purchases a small field outside the Canaanite city of Shechem. All seems well. But next, Hamor of Shechem, who is “exalted in the land” (נשיא הארץ, [Gen. 34:2](#)), sexually attacks Yaaqov's daughter, and this leads to Yaaqov owning the whole city through murder and violence. The stories could not be more opposite.

Reflection Question

How can we process the parts of the Bible that make us angry? What does it look like to think responsibly about these stories?

Session 25: Jacob's Silence

Key Takeaways

- In the aftermath of Shechem's crime, Yaaqov's silence and inaction creates a void that his sons fill with vengeful violence.
- The biblical authors tell the story of Yaaqov's sons' treachery with links to the flood narrative, but this is a nightmare version of God's just judgment and reconciliation through covenant.

Yaaqov's Sons Deceive the Men of Shechem

⁸ And Khamor spoke with them, saying,
"Sh'khem, my son, he has deep affection for your daughter.
Please, give her to him as a wife.

⁹ And become in-laws with us,
and give us your daughters,
and you may take our daughters for yourselves,
¹⁰ and dwell with us, and the land will be before you.
Dwell, and trade in it, and take possession of it."

¹¹ And Sh'khem said to her father and to her brothers,
"May I find favor in your eyes.
And whatever you tell me, I will give it.
¹² Make the bride-price and gift much for me,
and I will give it, according to what you tell me,
and give to me the young woman as a wife."

¹³ And the sons of Yaaqov responded with deception ,
to Sh'khem and to Khamor his father,
because he had defiled Dinah their sister .

¹⁴ And they said to them,
"We are not able to do this thing,
to give our sister to a man who has a foreskin,
because this is disgraceful to us.
¹⁵ Only on this condition will we give consent to you:
If you become like us,
by circumcising for yourselves every male .
¹⁶ Then we will give our daughters to you,

and we will take your daughters for ourselves,
and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people.

17 And if you do not listen to us, to get circumcised ,
then we will take our daughter,
and we will go.”

18 And their words were good
in the eyes of Khamor,
and in the eyes of Sh’khem son of Khamor,
19 and the young man did not delay in doing this thing,
because he took pleasure in the daughter of Yaaqov.
Now, he had honor, more than all of the house of his father.

20 And they spoke to the men of their city, saying,
21 “These men are peaceful with us,
and they will dwell in the land, and they will trade in it,
and the land, look, it is wide of hand before them,
and we will take their daughters for ourselves as wives,
and we will give our daughters to them.

22 Only on this condition will the men consent to us ,
to dwell with us, to become one people ,
by circumcising for ourselves every male , just as they are circumcised .

23 Their herds and their possessions and all their cattle,
won’t it become ours?
Only let us consent to them ,
so they can dwell with us.”

24 And they listened to Khamor and to Sh’khem his son,
everyone going out of the gate of his city,
and every male was circumcised ,
everyone going out of the gate of his city.

Genesis 34:8-24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Yaaqov's Sons Murder the Men of Shechem

25 And it came about on the third day,
while they were in pain,
that the sons of Yaaqov took up,
Shim’on and Levi,
brothers of Dinah,
each his own sword ,
and they came upon the peaceful city,
and they murdered every male.

26 And **Khamor and Sh'khem his son**,
they murdered with the mouth of **the sword**,
and **they took Dinah** from **the house** of **Sh'khem**,
and they went out.

27 **The sons of Yaaqov** came over the slain bodies,
and they plundered the city,
because they had defiled their sister.

28 Their flocks and their cattle and their donkeys,
and whatever was in **the city**,
and whatever was in the field,
they took it,

29 and all their wealth,
and all their children,
and all their wives,
they took them captive **and they plundered**,
and all that was in the house.

30 And Yaaqov said to **Shim'on and to Levi**,
"You have brought trouble upon me,
by making me stink
among the dwellers of the land, among **the Canaanite and Perezite**.
And I'm just a few bodies,
and they will gather against me and **strike me**,
and **I'll be destroyed**, me and **my house**!"

31 And they said,
"Should he have done to **our sister** as a prostitute?!"

Genesis 34:25-31. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Exalted Men, Sexual Abuse, Angry Brothers, and a Flood of Violence

The sequence of this story is modeled on a condensed replay of the key stories in Genesis 4-9, from Cain's murder to the rising violence that results in a flood of death.

The story begins with a series of clear references to Genesis 6:1-4.

- Genesis 34:1-2: Dinah "the daughter ... born to Yaaqov went out to look upon the daughters of the land, and he saw her ... and he took her ... and he lay with her." // Genesis 6:1-2: "and daughters were born to them [humanity], and the sons of *elohim* looked upon the daughters of humanity, that they were good, and they took them for wives ..."

- Genesis 34:2: Shechem, son of Hamor (= “Donkey”), the Hivite (cf. Gen. 10:17) is an “exalted one in the land” (נשיא הארץ) // Genesis 6:1-2: “the sons of *elohim*,” that is, the host of the skies (see Gen. 2:1)
- Genesis 34:1: Dinah's (דינה) name means “Judgment” // Genesis 6:3: “My spirit will not abide/contend (ידון) with humanity forever.”

As a follow-up to the Genesis 6:1-4 patterns, the rest of the story develops the flood/covenant pattern and merges it with the Cain/sibling rivalry pattern from Genesis 4.

- Genesis 34:3: “he spoke to her heart” // Genesis 8:21: “God spoke to his heart”
- Genesis 34:7: “and they were pained (ויתעצבו) and hot anger was to them (ויהר להם), greatly” // Genesis 6:6: “And God was pained (ויתעצב) in his heart” // Genesis 4:5: “and hot anger was to Cain (ויהר לקין), greatly.”
- Genesis 34:15: “circumcision” (מול) + “the flesh/every male” (בשר / זכר) // Genesis 6:17, 9:11: the “flood” (מבול) “cut off all flesh” (יכרת כל בשר)
- Genesis 34:25-26: “and the sons of Yaaqov, Shimon and Levi, the brothers of Dinah, they murdered (ויהרגו) every male ... and they murdered (הרגו) Hamor and Shechem his son” // Genesis 4:8: “And Cain rose up against his brother and he murdered him” (ויהרגהו)

A Deceptive Covenant of Circumcision

In the first flood narrative, Noah offered a sacrifice that God accepted, so God made a covenant of peace with Noah and all living creatures. That narrative pattern was developed in the story of Genesis 16-17, where Abraham and Sarah abused their Egyptian slave to produce a child, and God brought a flood of judgment on Abraham's genitals as well as a sign of covenant mercy: circumcision.

Recall from Genesis 17 that circumcision was a sign of the covenant so that anyone not from Abraham's family line through Sarah could still be included in the covenant blessing by being circumcised. In other words, circumcision was the way for non-Israelites to be included within the family chosen for blessing.

What was given by God as a sign of judgment and hope to Abraham for abusing the Egyptian slave is now used by Abraham's great grandchildren as a deceptive weapon against the Canaanites. But the Canaanites are not innocent. Their leader Shechem is guilty of the heinous offense of abusing an Israelite woman.

Genesis 34:15 Instructor's Translation

... we will consent (נאות) to you, if you become like us in being circumcised (מול) ...

Genesis 17:11 NASB

And you shall be circumcised (מול) in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign (אות) of the covenant between me and you.

What was given as a sign to include non-chosen lineages into the covenant is now being used as a ruse to destroy the non-chosen lineages.

Just as circumcision was divine judgment on Abraham's “instrument” of sin against Hagar the Egyptian, so now the sons of Yaaqov (“Deceiver”) use circumcision as a deceptive tool against Shechem, who used the same part of his body to “oppress” Dinah.

"In [Genesis] 17 the rite of circumcision was a sign (v. 11) of the unity of the covenant people and their separation from the rest of the nations. Circumcision was not limited to the seed of Abraham but was rather given as a sign of one's participation in the hope of God's promises to Abraham ... A thematic interplay between chapters 17 and 34 ... [T]he wordplay in the two chapters between the word sign (אֹת 17:11) and the consent (נְאוּת 34:15, 22-23) of the two families to live as one people ... Jacob and his family have continuously been characterized as those who attempted to carry out God's intentions by means of their own plans and schemes. On the surface, their plans worked reasonably well, though they always involved cunning and deceit to succeed. The writer does not wish to suggest that such plans represented God's own plans. On the contrary, Jacob's plans and those of his family are always depicted as the plans of those who were far ahead of God and his plans. Nevertheless, the ultimate purpose of these narratives is to show that in spite of the fact that such plans ran counter to God's own, they could not thwart the eventual success of his intentions."

Sailhamer, John H. (1995). [*The Pentateuch as Narrative*](#). Zondervan Academic. 201-202.

Reflection Question

How does pointing out the links to the flood narrative help us understand the story of Yaaqov's sons' treachery?



Module 6: Jacob's Return to the Land

SESSIONS 26-29

Jacob returns to Canaan, but the consequences of his scheming persist. See how God continues to work through imperfect partners to bring blessing to the world.

Session 26: Jacob Returns to Bethel

Key Takeaways

- Yaaqov's return to Bethel is a re-creation moment in the pattern of themes. He and his family are shedding the trappings of their Mesopotamian identity to be defined only by God's promise.
- As precious liquids that come from garden plants, wine and oil are Eden images. And pouring them out to anoint someone or something symbolizes saturating with abundance, like rain.

Yaaqov Returns to Bethel

¹ And Elohim said to Yaaqov,
"Get up. Go up to **Beth-El**,
and dwell there,
and **make there an altar** to the **El who became seen to you**,
when you fled from the face of your brother Esau."

² And Yaaqov said to his house and to everyone who was with him,
"Remove the **foreign Elohim** that are in your midst,
and purify yourselves, and change your clothes,
³ and let's get up and go up to **Beth-El**,
and **I will make there an altar**,
to the **El** who answered me in the day of my distress,
and he was with me on the road which I walked."

⁴ And they gave to Yaaqov
all **the foreign Elohim** in their hands,
and **the gold rings** that were in their noses,
and **he hid them underneath the oak tree** (lit. "**El** ah") that's next to Sh'khem.

⁵ And they journeyed on,
and the terror of Elohim was upon the cities that were around them,
and they did not chase after the sons of Yaaqov.

⁶ And Yaaqov went to **Luz**,
which is in the land of Canaan (this is **Beth-El**),

he and all the people who were with him,

⁷ and **he built there an altar** ,
and **he called** **the place** **"El of Beth-El,"**
because there **Elohim was revealed to him**,
when he fled from before the face of his brother .

⁸ And Deborah, the nurse-maid of Rivqah, died,
and **she was buried underneath Beth-El, underneath the oak tree**,
and **he called its name** **"Oak Tree** of Weeping" (lit. **"El** on-Bakkuth").

Genesis 35:1-8. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Death, Burial, and Leaving Mesopotamia Behind

These first two paragraphs have a parallel shape.

- Genesis 35:1 begins with a divine command that Yaaqov go to Bethel and build an altar. // In Genesis 35:6-7, Yaaqov goes to Bethel and builds an altar.
- Genesis 35:4 recounts how they bury and leave behind the jewelry and idol gods that marked their identity as Arameans. // In Genesis 35:8, they bury and leave behind Deborah, the nursemaid given to Rivqah by Lavan in Genesis 24:59.

While Yaaqov alone had the Bethel experience of God's presence back in Genesis 28:10-22, now God summons the entire family of Yaaqov to approach him. This requires a "purification" and a shedding of their Aramean and Mesopotamian identity. They are now being reidentified as the "family of Israel."

This association with "nose rings" and "idol-gods" will reappear in the Exodus story. The "gold and silver articles" the Israelites take from their Egyptian neighbors (Exod. 12:35-36) will become the "earrings and gold" that are used to make the golden calf! (see Exod. 32:1-6).

Yaaqov is Renamed, Again

⁹ And **Elohim became seen to Yaaqov** again,
when he came from Paddan-aram,
and he blessed him.

¹⁰ And Elohim said to him,
"Your name is **Yaaqov** .
Not anymore **will your name be called** **Yaaqov** ,
rather " **Yisrael** " **will be your name.**"
And he called his name **Yisrael** .

¹¹ And Elohim said to him,
"I am **El-Shaddai**.
Be fruitful and multiply!

A nation, and an assembly of nations will be from you,
and kings will come out from your loins.

¹² And the land which I gave to Avraham and Yitskhaq,
I will give it to you,
and to your seed after you,
I will give the land.”

¹³ And **Elohim went up from over him,**
at **the place** **where he spoke with him.**

¹⁴ And Yaaqov **stood up a standing-stone** ,
at **the place** **where he spoke with him,**
a standing-stone of stone ,
and he doused a drink-offering over it,
and he poured oil over it.

¹⁵ And Yaaqov **called the name** of **the place** ,
where Elohim had spoken with him,
“**Beth-El.**”

Genesis 35:9-15. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

The Bethel Promise, Again

The story of Yaaqov comes full circle as he returns to Bethel and hears a restatement of the same promise spoken to him before his exile. Notice that the basic themes of the promise, “seed” and “land,” recall the basic Eden-blessing promise given to humanity and Noah, and then to Abraham and Yitskhaq.

The new element of the promise, as far as Yaaqov is concerned, is the promise that “an assembly of nations will be from you, and kings will come from your loins” (Gen. 35:11). This is a restatement of what God said to Abraham in the covenant of circumcision.

Genesis 17:4-6 NASB

⁴ As for me, behold, my covenant is with you,
and you will be the father of a multitude of nations.

⁵ **No longer shall your name be called Abram,**
but your name shall be Abraham;
for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations.

⁶ **I will make you exceedingly fruitful,**
and I will make nations of you,
and kings will come forth from you.

Yaaqov's Name Changed, Again

Yaaqov's named was already changed to “Yisrael” by God back in the wrestling match in Genesis 32:23-33. Why does it need to be “changed” again?

If we compare this narrative to the wrestling match story, a number of differences stand out.

- The wrestling match depicted Yaaqov alone, at night, by the Jabbok stream. Now Yaaqov is accompanied by all of his family (Gen. 35:6 makes this very explicit), and together they appear before God at Bethel.
- At the Jabbok, Yaaqov was wrestling with God. Here at Bethel, Yaaqov and his family assemble for worship and for a declaration that “El Shaddai” is their *Elohim*.
- At the Jabbok, Yaaqov was blessed. Here at Bethel, Yaaqov is given a blessing that kings and a “multitude of nations” and will come from him. He stands with a sizable crew of family around him (the sons’ names are listed in Gen. 35:22b-26).
- Also, recall that the name Yisrael (יִשְׂרָאֵל) is capable of two different meanings in Hebrew.
 - Meaning 1: “He Wrestles With El” — This meaning is activated in the Jabbok story.
 - Meaning 2: “El Rules” — This meaning seems to be activated in the Bethel story because directly afterward Yaaqov is told, for the first time, that “kings will come from your loins.” In other words, the royal rule of El over creation (recall Gen. 1:26-28, humans ruling as an image of God) will now be channeled through the seed of Yisrael.

Reflection Question

Compare Yaaqov’s return to Bethel in Genesis 35:1-15 to his encounter with God there in Genesis 28:10-22. How has Yaaqov changed between these two moments?

Session 27: The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac

Key Takeaways

- Rakhel's difficult labor recalls both the promise of a victorious seed and the dire consequences for the woman in Genesis 3:15-16.
- Reuben's sexual assault against Bilhah is another instance in a pattern of illicit sex used in a grab for power.
- The four burials in Genesis 35 each recall moments of deception in Yaaqov's story.

Rakhel and Yitskhaq Die, Reuben's Treachery

¹⁶ And they journeyed on from Beth-El,
and it happened, while they were still a stretch of land from the entrance of Ephrathah,
that **Rakhel** gave birth ,
and **she had difficulty in giving birth** .

¹⁷ And it came about, while **she was having difficulty in giving birth** ,
that the midwife said to her,
 "Don't be afraid,
 because also this one is for you a **son**!"
¹⁸ And it came about, while her life was going out, because **she was dying**,
that **she called his name**,
 "**Son** of My Grief" (lit. "Ben-'oniy"),
but **his father called him**,
 "**Son of My Right Hand**" (lit. "**Ben-yamin**").

¹⁹ And **Rakhel died**,
 and she was buried on the road to Ephrathah
 (this is Beth-Lekhem).
²⁰ And Yaaqov **stood up a standing-stone** on **her burial**,
 (this is the standing stone of **the burial of Rakhel** unto today).

²¹ And Yisrael journeyed on,
and he set up his tent beyond "Tower of the Flock" [lit. "Migdal-Eder"].
²² And it came about when Yisrael was dwelling in that land,
that **Reuven** went and he laid with **Bilhah** , the concubine of his father,

and Yisrael heard of it.

And the sons of Yaaqov were twelve:

23 **Sons of** Leah:

The firstborn of Yaaqov was **Reuven**,
and Shim'on and Levi and Yehudah and Yissakar and Zebulun.

24 **Sons of** **Rakhel**:

Yoseph and **Benjamin**.

25 **Sons of** **Bilhah**, female slave of Rakhel:

Dan and Naphtali.

26 **Sons of** Zilpah, female slave of Leah:

Gad and Asher.

These are the sons of Yaaqov
who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

27 And Yaaqov went to **Yitskhaq** his father,
at Mamre, Qiryat-Arba' [= "City of the Four"],
(this is Hebron)
where Avraham and Yitskhaq had migrated.

28 And the days of Yitskhaq were one hundred and eighty years.

29 And **Yitskhaq** expired **and he died**,
and he was gathered to his fathers, old and full of days,
and **they buried him**, Esau and Yaaqov, his sons.

Genesis 35:16-29. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

The Many Burials

There are four "burial" notices in this collection of stories, three of people and one of idols, each illuminating the others.

Genesis 35:4: Idols	Genesis 35:6, 8: Deborah	Genesis 35:17-20: Rakhel	Genesis 35:29: Yitskhaq
And they gave to Yaaqov all the foreign gods (idols, ear rings), and he hid (טמן) them	And Yaaqov went to Luz ... (that is, Bethel) ... And she died (ותמת), Deborah the nursemaid	And as [Rakhel's] birth was harsh, her midwife said to her ... And she died (ותמת),	And Yitskhaq died (וימת) ... and they buried him (ויקברו),
Yaaqov Many Burials. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).			

Genesis 35:4: Idols	Genesis 35:6, 8: Deborah	Genesis 35:17-20: Rakhel	Genesis 35:29: Yitskhaq
under the oak (תחת האלה) which is in Shechem.	of Rebekah, and she was buried (ותקבר) under the oak (תחת האלון) and he called its name "Oak of Weeping."	Rakhel, and she was buried (ותקבר) on the road to Ephrathah (that is, Bethlehem), and Yaaqov set up a pillar upon her grave (that's the pillar of the grave of Rakhel unto today).	Esau and Yaaqov, his sons.
<i>Yaaqov Many Burials. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).</i>			

Rakhel's death in [Genesis 35:19](#) is set on analogy to the death of Deborah, to the burial of the idols in [Genesis 35:4](#), and also to Yitskhaq's death which quickly follows.

The buried idols remind of us Rakhel's theft of those same idols in [chapter 31](#). Are we meant to conclude that her death is somehow connected to Yaaqov's words back in [Genesis 31:32](#)? "The one with whom your *elohim* are found, that one will not live!"

The death of Deborah reminds us of Rivqah's deception (in [ch. 27](#)) and the fact that her promise in [Genesis 27:45](#) to send for Yaaqov never came true. In fact, Rivqah is the only matriarch in Genesis whose death and burial goes unmentioned. Only her maidservant is named, and Deborah too dies as Yaaqov returns to the land.

"Genesis also tells us about the death and burial of each patriarch's favorite wife (Sarah, [Gen. 23:1-20](#); Rachel, [Gen. 35:19](#)). The exception is Rebekah, apart from the summarizing statement in [49:31](#). Presumably she died and was buried before Jacob returned from Aram-naharaim, for there is no reference to Jacob being reunited with Rebekah. Rebekah is gone, though survived by her nurse, but only until Jacob arrives. He not only does not get to see his mother, but he is forced to become undertaker for his late mother's nurse. Thus, one of Jacob's first experiences after coming back home is confronting death. By including the name Rebekah, the author helps his reader recall her character, she who instigated the deception of Isaac. Her punishment (implied at least) is that she will never get to see her son again."

Hamilton, Victor P. (1995). [The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50](#). Eerdmans. 378.

Yitskhaq's death brings the story full circle. Recall that at the beginning of [Genesis 27](#), Yitskhaq said that the day of his death may be near ([Gen. 27:1-3](#)). But in fact, he lived another 20 years, through Yaaqov's entire exile!

These four burials all link together because each one reminds the reader of some element of Yaaqov's deceptions in the past. As he returns to the land, he is surrounded by reminders of his past and of the deception and relational damage that he caused so many years ago.

- Burying the idols: Recalls Rakhel's deception of her father, which was parallel to Yaaqov's deception of his father Yitskhaq.

- Burying Deborah: Recalls Rivqah's deception of her husband, in league with Yaaqov, and how Yaaqov never saw his mother again.
- Burying Rakhel: Recalls Yaaqov's curse in Genesis 31:32, which said the one who stole the idols would die, while sadly, Yaaqov, the one who stole the blessing, lives on.
- Burying Yitskhaq: Recalls Yaaqov's deception of Yitskhaq, and how he died not long after he returned from the land.

Reuben's Lust for Power

The story of Reuben's rape of Bilhah is another sordid moment for the sons of Yaaqov. Within the larger frame of [Genesis 33:18-35:29](#), there is a deliberate strategy to compare Reuben's behavior with Shechem, son of Hamor, from [Genesis 34](#).

Yaaqov and Reuben	Yaaqov, Sh'khem, Shim'on, and Levi
Gen. 35:21 And Israel set out and he pitched his tent (ויט אהלה) from there to Migdal Eder	Gen. 33:18-20 Yaaqov went to the city of Shechem in the land of Canaan when he returned from Paddan-aram, and there he pitched his tent (נטה אהליו) ... and he set up (ויצב) an altar (מזבח)
Gen. 35:22 And while Israel dwelt in that land, Reuben went and laid with Bilhah, concubine of his father, and Israel heard of it .	Gen. 34 Shechem son of Khamor rapes Dinah daughter of Yaaqov Gen. 34:5 And Yaaqov heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter ... and Yaaqov kept silent . Simeon and Levi deceive and murder the men of Shechem.
Gen. 49:3-4 Reuben , you are my firstborn; my might and the beginning of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it—he went up to my couch .	Gen. 49:5-7 Simeon and Levi are brothers; their swords are implements of violence . Let my soul not enter into their council; let not my glory be united with their assembly; because in their anger they murdered men , and in their self-will they lamed oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel. I will disperse them in Yaaqov, and scatter them in Israel.
Yaaqov, Reuben, and Sh'khem Comparison. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).	

In both sequences, Yaaqov pitches a tent right before a disaster hits his family.

In the first sequence, Shechem rapes Yaaqov's daughter, leading to the violent revenge carried out by his second- and third-born sons. In the second sequence, Reuben rapes Yaaqov's concubine, who was the slave of Rakhel who just died.

Through this parallelism, Reuben is compared to both the abusive Shechem and to his violent brothers. Notice that in Genesis 49, all three come in for critique and curse.

While Reuben's motives are not stated, the reader is invited into a whole network of narrative patterns where illicit sex is a way of challenging one's rival.

- The sons of *Elohim* (Gen. 6:1-4)
- Ham "seeing the nakedness of his father" (Gen. 9:18-23)
- Lot's daughters having drunk sex with their father in the cave (Gen. 19:30-38)
- Leah attempting to buy the conjugal rights of Yaaqov (Gen. 30:14-16)
- Abner sleeping with Saul's concubine (2 Sam. 3:7-8)
- Absalom raping David's concubines (2 Sam. 15:16 and 16:22)
- Adoniyah's request to sleep with David's concubine (1 Kings 2:13-25)

"This incident is directly linked to the foregoing because it is Rachel's demise that presents the occasion for Reuben's act. By violating Bilhah, Reuben makes sure that she cannot supplant or even rival his mother's [Leah's] position of chief wife now that Rachel is dead ... In this connection, it is interesting that Reuben had earlier been involved in the attempt to get his father to restore the conjugal rights of his mother (30:14-16). As a result of Reuben's cohabitation with Bilhah, she would thereby acquire the tragic status of 'living widowhood ...' All this leads to the conclusion that Reuben's bid to promote his mother's rights is at the same time a calculated challenge to his father's authority. His move is more political than lustful. The summary account in this verse hides an attempt to usurp the leadership of the Israelite tribes. Its failure is reflected in Jacob's rebuke of 49:3-4, in which he removes Reuben from hegemony over the tribes."

Sarna, Nahum M. (2001). [*Genesis, The JPS Torah Commentary*](#). JPS. 245.

Reflection Question

How do the curses and consequences of Genesis 3:14-19 continue to show up in the Yaaqov story?

Session 28: Jacob and Esau Part Ways

Key Takeaways

- The brothers, Yaaqov and Esau, cannot dwell together in unity because they have too much wealth, most of it obtained through deception.
- The genealogies in Genesis show us that the narrative is laser-focused on tracing the lineage of the hoped-for messianic king who will crush the snake.
- The Yaaqov story explores the nuance and complexity of human motives in a way that is truly unique in the Hebrew Bible.

Brothers Who Cannot Dwell Together in Unity

36:1 And these are the generations of Esau (this is Edom).

² **Esau took his wives** from the daughters of **Canaan**:

Adah, daughter of Elon the Hittite,

and **Oholibamah**, daughter of of Anah, daughter of Zib'on the Hivite,

³ and **Basemath**, daughter of Yishmael, sister of Nebaiyoth.

⁴ And **Adah** birthed for Esau Eliphaz,

and **Basemath** birthed Re'u'el,

⁵ and **Oholibamah** birthed Ye'ush and Ya'lam and Qorakh.

These are the sons of Esau that were born for him in the land of Canaan.

⁶ **And Esau took his wives** ¹

and his sons²

and his daughters³

and all the people of his house,⁴

and his herds⁵

and his beasts⁶

and all his **possessions** ⁷ that he accumulated in the land of **Canaan**,

and he went to **the land** opposite the face of Yaaqov his brother,

⁷ because their **possessions** were too many for them to dwell together as one,

and **the land** of their migrations was not able to carry them,

because of their **possessions**.

⁸ **And Esau dwelt in the mountains of Seir**.

Esau, he is Edom.

A **36:9-19** These are the generations of Esau, father of Edom, in Mount Seir

36:9 "Esau, father of Edom"

36:19 "Esau, he is Edom"

B **36:20-30** These are the sons of Seir the Horite, dwellers of the land

B' **36:31-39** These are the kings who ruled in the land Edom

A' **36:40-43** These are the names of the chiefs of Esau

36:43 "He is Esau, father of Edom"

37:1 And Yaaqov dwelt

in the land of the migrations of his father,

in the land of Canaan.

Genesis 36:1-37:1. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

At the conclusion of the Yaaqov story, we find a narrative that returns us to the drama of Yaaqov and Esau that began this movement of the Genesis scroll. Yaaqov and Esau, who were rivals from birth, are now wealthy and have many people and possessions in their households. In fact, they have too many, and so they cannot dwell together.

Notice the focus on Esau's seven-fold household (the list has seven items). This is meant to recall Abraham and Lot's inability to dwell in the same land because of their many possessions.

Abraham and Lot	Yaaqov and Esau
Gen. 12:10-20 Abraham accumulated wealth through his deception of Pharaoh	Gen. 27, 30 Yaaqov accumulates wealth through his deception of his father and his uncle
Gen. 13:2 "And Abram was very heavy with herds and with silver and with gold."	Gen. 36:6 "And [Esau] ... went to the land opposite the face of Yaaqov his brother."
Gen. 13:5-6 "Now, also belonging to Lot, who went with Abram, were flocks and cattle and tents. And the land could not carry them for dwelling together, for their possessions were so many, and they were not able to dwell together."	Gen. 36:7 "Because their possessions were too many for them to dwell together as one, and the land of their migrations was not able to carry them, because of their possessions."

Disunity Among Brothers. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

Abraham and Lot	Yaaqov and Esau
Gen. 13:12 “Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the valley, and he set up his tent by Sodom.”	Gen. 36:8 “And Esau dwelt in the mountains of Seir. Esau, he is Edom.” Gen. 37:1 “And Yaaqov dwelt in the land of the migrations of his father, in the land of Canaan.”
Lot ends up sleeping with his daughters and becoming the father of the Moabites and Ammonites, who live east of the Jordan and are hostile to Israel.	Esau ends up marrying an Ishmaelite wife and becoming the father of the Edomites, who live east of the Jordan and are hostile to Israel.
<i>Disunity Among Brothers. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).</i>	

In Genesis 12-13, Abraham’s ill-gotten gain causes a rupture in the family, so he cannot dwell with his brother in peace. That conflict ended peacefully in the short term, but eventually Lot became the father of the Moabites and Ammonites. These tribes go on to become long-term rivals who are hostile to Israel.

Similarly, in Genesis 36, Yaaqov’s ill-gotten blessing and wealth also cause a rupture, and he cannot live with Esau in peace. So the brothers separate, becoming the fathers of tribes who will be hostile to each other for centuries to come.

⁹ And these are the generations of Esau, the father of Edom in the mountains of Seir.

¹⁰ **These are the names of the sons of Esau :**
Eliphaz, son of Adah, wife of Esau;
Re’u’el, son of Basemat, wife of Esau.

¹¹ And **the sons of Eliphaz** were:
Teman, Omar, Zepho and Ga’tam and Qenaz.

¹² **And Timna’ was the concubine of Eliphaz, son of Esau, and she birthed Amaleq for Eliphaz.**
These are the **sons of Adah, wife of Esau.**

¹³ And these are **the sons of Re’u’el:**
Nakhat and Zerakh, Shammah and Mizzah.
These were **the sons of Basemat, wife of Esau.**

¹⁴ And these were **the sons of Oholibamah,** daughter of Anah, daughter of Zib’on, **wife of Esau,** and she birthed for Esau **Ya’ush and Ya’lam and Qorakh.**

15 **These are the chiefs of the sons of Esau :**

the sons of Eliphaz, firstborn of Esau:

chief Teman, chief Omar, chief Zepho, chief Qenaz,

16 chief Qorakh, chief Ga'tam, chief Amaleq.

These are the chiefs of Eliphaz in the land of Edom.

These are the sons of Adah.

17 And these are the chiefs of the sons of Re'u'el, son of Esau:

chief Nekath, chief Zerakh, chief Shaman, chief Mizzah.

These are the chiefs of Re'u'el in the land of Edom,

these are the sons of Basemat, wife of Esau.

18 And these are the sons of Oholibamah, wife of Esau:

chief Ya'ush, chief Ya'lam, chief Qorakh.

These are the chiefs of Oholibamah, daughter of Anah, wife of Esau.

19 **These are the sons of Esau ,
and these are their chiefs .**

He is Edom.

Genesis 36:9-19. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

20 **These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the dwellers of the land :**

Lotan ¹ and Shobal ² and Zib'on ³ and Anah ⁴,

21 and Dishon ⁵ and Etser ⁶ and Dishan ⁷.

These are the chiefs of the Horite, sons of Seir in the land of Edom .

22 And the sons of Lotan were Horite and Hemam.

And the sister of Lotan was Timna'.

23 And these are the sons of Shobal :

Alwan and Mankhat and Ebal, Shepho and Onam.

24 And these are the sons of Zib'on :

Ayah and Anah.

(This is the Anah who found the hot water springs in the wilderness,
when he was shepherding the donkeys of Zib'on his father.)

25 And these are the sons of Anah:

Dishon and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah.

26 And these are the sons of Dishon :

Khemdan and Eshban and Yitran and Keran.

27 These are the sons of Etser :

Bilhan and Ze'on and Aqan.

28 These are the sons of Dishan :

29 **These are the chiefs of the Horite :**

chief **Lotan** ,¹ chief **Shobal** ,² chief **Zib'on** ,³ chief **Anah** ,⁴

30 chief **Dishon** ,⁵ chief **Etser** ,⁶ chief **Dishan** .⁷

These are the chiefs of the Horite by their chiefs in the land of Seir .

Genesis 36:20-30. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

31 And these are **the kings who reigned as kings**

in the land of Edom ,

before **a king reigned as king**

for the sons of Yisrael .

32 And Bela' son of Be'or **reigned as king** ,

and the name of his city was Dinhabah .

33 And Bela' died,

and Yobab son of Zerakh **reigned as king** in his place **from Botzrah .**

34 And Yobab died,

and Khusham **reigned** as king in his place **from the land of the Temanite .**

35 And Khusham died,

and Hadad son of Bedad **reigned as king** in his place,

the one who who struck Midyan in the field of Moab,

and the name of his city was Avith .

36 And Hadad died,

and Samlah from Masreqah **reigned as king** in his place.

37 And Samlah died,

and Sha'ul from Rekhoboth-Hanahar **reigned as king** in his place.

38 And Sha'ul died,

and Ba'al Khanan son of Akhbor **reigned as king** in his place.

39 And Ba'al Khanan son of Akhbor died,

and Hadar **reigned as king** in his place,

and the name of his city was Pa'u ,

and the name of his wife was Mehetab'el,

daughter of Matred,

daughter of Mey-Zahab

Genesis 36:31-39. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).

40 **And these are the names of the chiefs of Esau,**

by their families, by their places, by their names:

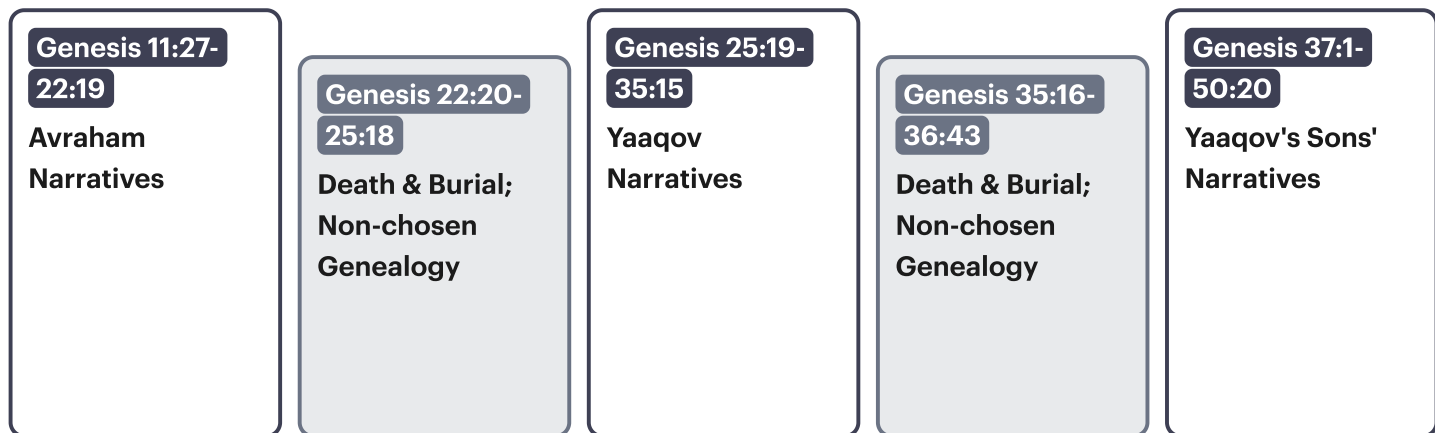
chief Timna', chief 'Alwah, chief Yetet
41 chief Oholibamah, chief Elah, chief Pinon,
42 chief Qenaz, chief Teman, chief Mibtzar,
43 chief Magdi'el, chief 'Iram.

These are the chiefs of Edom,

by their dwellings, in the land of their possession.

This is **Esau**, the father of **Edom**.

Genesis 36:40-43. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Jacob (2021).



Genesis 11:27-50:20. Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

This pattern highlights an important compositional design that occurs throughout the entire Genesis scroll. The main narrative traces the lineage of the promised seed to a set of siblings. Then, after the story of their separation, the non-chosen line is ushered off the stage with a genealogy that extends far past the narrative time perspective. After this, the narrative backtracks and focuses on the chosen line, picking up their story.

 Diagram showing where genealogies in Genesis branch between chosen and non-chosen lines.
Genealogies in Genesis. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Abraham (2021).

Reflection Question

How do the genealogies in Genesis shape the narrative, and what does this shape indicate about the narrative's focus?

Session 29: Reflecting on the Jacob Story

Key Takeaways

- Yaaqov's story is a mirror in which we can examine our motives and gain perspective on how God's blessing shows up in our lives and in our world.
- What we choose to do with the blessings God pours out has serious consequences.
- Studying Scripture in community can powerfully unite people from across a wide spectrum of backgrounds and experiences.



This session has no notes

Reflection Question

Take some time to reflect on the insights you learned in this class.