

## Survey of the Bible

### Notes from 12-15-19 Class

While no promises are being made, there's a chance we may get all the way through Genesis today.

To review...We're looking at Genesis 2-50 and Exodus 1-20. These books are a saga of Israel's origins, which has component parts. It began as a series of myths (stories that disclose the worldview of a people) in Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, and the Tower of Babel. The myths are followed by Legendary Histories (histories passed generation to generation, deemed to be historical though not verifiably so). The Legendary Histories we looked at so far were those of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (the patriarchs), and now Joseph (not strictly speaking a patriarch). These were all specific types of Legendary Histories, so for example we saw that Abraham was a journey narrative, Isaac was what we called..."meh". Essentially there was nothing there; there were just a couple descriptions that were obscure or repetitive, not much of anything. And then Jacob was a series of eponyms. These are stories and histories about the individuals about whom peoples and nations are named. Finally, we're getting to Joseph today and we're going to see this is a novella. Last month we had discussed the birth of eleven of the twelve sons of Jacob, and so now we get to Jacob's birth, and we'll start at Genesis 30:25.

\*Quick discussion from a question about angels – Where does the idea of angels come from? Becca explained that many things come about as just ideas, for example Satan. No one actually believes there's a flaming red guy who lives somewhere deep under the ground with a pitchfork and a spiked tail. People intuitively know that any discussion of Satan is really a distillate of evil, or a personification of evil. When you hear of Adam, you can guess that he's really an example of a metaman, and example of all mankind, he is who we are. In terms of angels though, the bible affirms them literally. The bible affirms cosmologically that there's God, there's these angels (and in Hebrew that word means 'messengers'), and then there's the created order. So the bible affirms the actual reality of the angelic order that has humanoid beings and has animal beings (the cherubim and the seraphim). Many joined in this discussion to note that sometimes angels can be seen or not seen but felt. Jim told a story of his daughter being saved from serious injury once because a hand held her in place. Lynnly has a similar story. Becca noted that all sorts of people have told her of similar accounts, and that usually the people are hesitant to even mention it out in public because they're afraid that people will think they're crazy.

Back to Genesis 30:25...

We had just seen eleven of the twelve sons of Jacob, gotten between the dueling sisters Rachael and Leah and their two maidservants that became lesser wives. Now Joseph comes along, he's number eleven, and Jacob goes to his father-in-law, Laban, and asks him to give him the property that is due him and let him go back to his own family. Laban tells him, that he has learned from divination that the Lord has blessed him because of having Jacob around, and instructs Jacob to name whatever it is he wants and he will give it to him. Remember that Laban is the king of shenanigans. So Jacob, down in verse 31, says "You're not going to give me anything. If you'll let me go, I'll work for you a bit longer and take just the speckled or spotted goats as my wages." Here we read that Laban agrees to that saying, "Let it be as you have said." But here comes the King of Shenanigans, who goes right out and takes all the speckled and spotted animals away and sets out on a three days journey to put some distance between himself and Jacob.

Starting in verse 37 we just get a description of some ancient methods of animal husbandry, and Jacob repopulating the flock with a bunch of speckled and spotted animals, so let's skip ahead to chapter 31. Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were grumbling that Jacob was taking all the wealth of their father's. Now he finds himself in the middle of a rivalry between himself and the actual sons. They're jealous of everything Jacob is able to accomplish. Jacob can see that the sons are turning against him, and he could also see that Laban had no real regard for him either, but then the Lord comes to him and tells him to return to the land he originally

came from so he knows he has to get out of Dodge. He just has to break the news to the two sisters he's married. He gets the sisters together and tells them that Laban has cheated him and stolen his wages, and it turns out the sisters don't care for their father that much either. They feel Laban has treated them like foreigners, and ripped them off from what they should have been able to inherit as well since he is not giving their husband what he has earned. So they all band together to escape. Jacob sends his children and his wives ahead of him on camels, and he drives all his livestock behind, and they head for the land of his father in the land of Canaan. He did this while Laban was gone, so taking advantage of the absence of her father, Rachael stole her father's household gods.

This is the earliest sustained narrative in the bible, dating to 960 BCE. At this time there was a pervasive polytheistic culture, just as there was at the time of Abraham. In this situation, we are seeing the earliest stages of monotheism expressing itself as henotheism. Henotheism is the preference for one god among a pantheon of many. We're not all the way to monotheism yet, but this is the beginnings. Rachael steals her father's household gods, which were probably little statues symbolizing those gods, but they were the gods that Laban favored over all the other gods available to choose from. This transition to monotheism won't be complete until 539 BCE.

So off they all go, and on the third day Laban is told that Jacob has fled. Not being one to give up easily, he grabs all his kinsmen and takes off after Jacob. They overtake him, and Laban is outraged even though he's the King of Shenanigans, and stole all the animals he had promised to Jacob, and Jacob really had no choice but to escape or be stuck in his situation forever. When Laban catches up to Jacob he suddenly changes into not the king of shenanigans now, but the king of deceit. He goes berserk insisting that Jacob has deceived him and kidnapped his daughters like captives of the sword. He insists that he would have sent him away with dancing and mirth and songs if he hadn't so deceitfully snuck away, stealing his daughters along with his flock. He's also pretty upset that Jacob stole his gods. Jacob explains that he was afraid Laban would prevent him from ever leaving and would take away his animals and his wives, and so he had to spirit off with them secretly, but he also insists that he never took Laban's gods and tells him to search the tents. Jacob assures him that anyone they find with the gods will be put to death. Laban in verse 33 goes looking through all the tents and can't find the gods, mainly because Rachael had hidden them in the saddle of her camel. By the time Laban is finished searching the tents and not finding anything, Jacob is finally angry and really upbraids Laban. He insists that Laban show him the thing he has supposedly stolen, which he can't. He goes on to shout about how long he served this crazy father-in-law, and how much Laban has stolen from him, and that if it weren't that his God was watching out for him he probably would still be stuck there slaving away for no pay. That even now, if it weren't for the fear Laban has of Jacob's God, he would probably send him back to his father emptyhanded.

Like all bullies, Laban doesn't fight back, he says they'll just let bygones be bygones and they'll 'cut' a covenant between them right there in the desert. We previously discussed the 'cutting' of a covenant, where animals were cut symmetrically in half, and then lit on fire and the two parties walked between them to signify or formalize the covenant. Well by now they aren't doing that anymore, but they still call it 'cutting' a covenant. At this time we're going to see how the ritual has changed, because they're going to do something a little different. Jacob has all his kinsfolk gather up stones into a pillar. The idea behind the pillar was that, just like the great wall of China, God would be able to look down and his eye would be drawn to the pillar and he would recognize the covenant. Here's the covenant, and these words should all sound a little familiar to you all...

Laban says, "The Lord watch between you and me while we are absent, one from the other, if you ill treat my daughters, or if you take wives in addition to my daughters, remember that God is a witness between you and me." So the words that we say in Christian fellowship at the end of our service, if we were saying them in the right context, would be really suspicious because Laban is asking God to watch and make sure Jacob doesn't do wrong by him or his daughters. He's saying that God is watching, don't you dare do anything behind my back.

So if we were saying it in context the words we say at the end of our service, we would actually be saying something very snotty and suspicious, almost spiteful, to each other: "The Lord's watching you Jim, don't you do anything behind my back." And do it with a glare, and maybe a little suspicion and derision if you really want to get it right. But that's there covenant, so what are you going to do?

So Jacob and Laban part company on that friendly note, and Jacob continues on to his homeland. But he has another problem to overcome, and that's the Esau problem. If you remember he had swindled his brother out of his inheritance and the blessing that conferred it, so he still has to deal with that.

If we turn now to Gen 32:3 we see that Jacob is going to try to appease Esau now. Jacob sends messengers before him to Esau to tell him that Jacob has lived with Laban as a guhr (as one dispossessed of his homeland) and stayed until now, but has finally come home and has a bunch of family and animals and slaves (to assure him he's not coming home broke). The messengers return from Esau and explain to Jacob that Esau has gotten the message and is coming to meet him with 400 men. OK, so now Jacob is a little outnumbered. At this point we're coming up on the punchline of Jacob, which is Jacob wrestling with the angel. Jacob is now beginning to have the stirrings of conscious. This Jacob coming back home is not the same Jacob that swindled his brother. Jacob says, "Oh God of my Father Isaac and his father Abraham, God who told me to return to my kindred, I am not worthy of the least of all of your hessed (your covenantal grace), and the faithfulness you've shown me. You've prospered me and I'm not worthy. With only my staff I originally crossed this river Jordan, but now I return with two companies of kinsmen. Deliver me from my brother. I'm afraid of him; he may come and kill us all. Please protect me."

It's in this context, in Gen 32:22, that he wrestles with the angel. Here is the reason that this is his punchline. Jacob stole his brother's birthright and blessing. It wasn't his. He is the illegitimate owner of that birthright and blessing just as if I went out and stole Clyde and Sharon's car because I thought it was nicer than mine. I may have it, but it's still theirs, not mine. Stealing something doesn't make it yours. So Jacob stole the birthright and blessing; he's the illegitimate owner of the patriarchy. So he's wrestling with God to legitimate him. It's a sort of precarious position to be in, to be the illegitimate owner of a patriarchy, so he wrestles with God to legitimize that ownership. If you look in verse 22 we see the following: "That same night he got up and he took his two wives, his two maids (those were his second class wives), and his eleven children and crossed the ford of the Jabbock (river). He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else he had." He's sending them across the stream so he can face his brother alone.

When he's finally left alone, a man wrestles with him until day break. And when the man saw that he wasn't going to prevail against Jacob, he struck him in the hip socket and put it out of joint. The man said to Jacob, "Let me go," but Jacob told him he would not let him go unless you bless me. He's looking for legitimacy for his patriarchy. The angel says to him, "What's your name?" and Jacob tells him, "I am the supplanter." But the man said, "No, you're not a supplanter, you're Israel, because you've striven with God and you prevailed." This is his punchline, because it's here that he ascends to the level of a true Patriarch. In spite of that he still needs to deal with his brother though.

If we look in verse 33, Jacob sees Esau coming toward him with the 400 men, and here's his flimsy defense... He divides the children between the two sisters and the two maids, and he puts the maids and their kids at the front, and then Leah and her children, and then he brings up the rear with Rachael and Joseph. Which is kind of insulting to the two concubine wives, because obviously they are expendable. If Esau is in a fighting mood Jacob reasons that maybe he'll realize he's killing women and children before he gets back to his legit wives. So Jacob sets everybody up like this, and then he goes at the front bowing to the ground as Esau approaches. He bows down seven times, which we'll see again and again as divine number.

He figures by bowing seven times he'll be summoning God's aid. But here's the upshot. Esau comes running up to him and embraces him and fell on his neck weeping. The 400 guys were the welcome wagon. He's not mad at all, he welcomes him home. They are reunited and Jacob is welcomed back into his homeland.

So that essentially ends our story of Jacob, and now we move on to Joseph, which as we said is really a novella. A novella, genre-wise, is really just a shortened novel. It reads like a novel. It obviously has a historical root, but stylistically it has more of a fictionalized account of Joseph's life. Like all novels, it needs to have a very well-developed plot and characters, conflict, etc., but that doesn't make it very easy to outline. We can outline Abraham along the episodes of his journey. We can outline Jacob along side the eponymous nature of his story, but this we just have to kind of follow the contours of the plot.

Now we said that Joseph isn't really a patriarch. Here's how we know. Let's turn to Genesis chapter 37. Jacob settles in the land where his father had lived as a guhr, in the land of Canaan. Here we read, "This is the story of the *family* of Jacob." So it's the story of the family rather than the lineage of Jacob. Where previously the bible has laid out the lineage of the starring character, because they were all patriarchs, now it is laying out the story of the family. And it's doing that because Joseph isn't the first-born son. He's the star of the story, but he's at the back end of twelve brothers. And now we should talk a little about the man of charisma, because we haven't met one yet. The man of charisma in the bible has two main traits: he has unpredictable origins, so you can't say something the man of charisma is going to arise from the white race, or from the straight race, or from a certain common creed. They come from everywhere and anywhere in unpredictable ways. That's the first trait of the man of charisma. The second trait is they have intrinsic greatness that causes them to rise to the fore.

So the bible kind of backs this phenomenon of this man of charisma, and it sets it over, opposed to, the man of dynasty. The man of dynasty is of very predictable origin, and lays claim to his greatness through his bloodline. Not the man of charisma. The man of charisma just arises, and his intrinsic greatness causes him to be the man of the hour. Obviously, the bible is right here. Our own history bears this up. Most people would rank as the greatest American Abe Lincoln. He's posthumously become almost a saint in the U.S. but, in his time, you wouldn't have seen that coming at all. He was born in Kentucky in a cabin, and then they made their way to Illinois, and in the middle of their journey winter struck so they made this kind of three walled lean-to where they stayed with their donkey. Then he gets to Illinois he's mostly self-taught, and he's probably the best old testament scholar you'll find. Most of the decisions he made were based on his understanding of the bible, so he just knew what was right, he could see it, and had 20/20 vision when it came to moral clarity. But he was a man of charisma. He's a dear figure to us now, but he was a joke in Washington at the time. Plus he was tall and gawky, so it was obviously his intrinsic greatness that caused him to rise so. Martin Luther King, Jr. would be another man of charisma. Now compare those two guys to Prince Charles in England. History bears up this phenomenon of what the bible calls the man of charisma, and Joseph is one of them.

As this story starts out, he's a bit of a brat. The bible is all over birth order theory here in this section. Birth order theory says that the first child is supposed to be the responsible one, who's dutiful and compliant and wants to do right by his parents. The second one is deadlocked in perpetual competition with the first. The third has opted out of that and generally wants nothing to do with the family, and the fourth (if there is one) is usually a charismatic kind of clown. That's just what birth order theory tells us, and the bible in this section is all over that, because we find Joseph as the spoiled younger child. He's not quite the youngest child, but he's the best youngest child because he's number eleven, and he's the firstborn between Jacob and Rachael. He's the apple of his father's eye. He starts out not looking all that charismatic.

Look in Gen 37:2. Jacob is seventeen years old at this point, and he's out in the fields shepherding with a couple of his half-brothers, and he "brought a bad report of them back to his father." He's a tattler.

We go on to read that Joseph is the apple of his father's eye. Israel (he had his name changed if you'll recall, when he wrestled with God and won) loved Joseph more than the other children because he was the son of his old age (and also of his favorite wife). And Israel made him a long robe with sleeves. OK, this is one of the spots in the bible where the actual meaning of the Hebrew words here is uncertain. Thousands of biblical scholars and Hebrew scholars have gone back and forth over what the words here actually meant. Back in the second century BCE the scholars translating from Hebrew to Greek decided the words meant "a coat of many colors", but most scholars don't agree that the words meant that. The real masters of the old testament now generally believe that the original Hebrew meant an embroidered tunic with flared sleeves. The point is that it isn't a multi-colored coat, and it may not be an embroidered tunic with flared sleeves, but it was a special cloak or tunic that the other brothers didn't get.

Israel made him this tunic, and when his other brothers saw him with it they hated him, and couldn't speak peacefully to him. But now Joseph is going to show us that he's all about dreams. He's going to have these portentous dreams and then later he's going to show that he's able to interpret dreams as well. So look in Gen 37:5... Joseph tells his brothers about these dreams, and once they heard them they hated him even more. His first dream is of Joseph and the other brothers binding sheaves out in the field, when suddenly Joseph's sheave rose up and the others' sheaves bowed down before his. And naturally his brothers asked if he meant to imply that they were all going to have to bow down to him and have him as their master with dominion over them, and they were even angrier with him. then he goes on to have another dream, and for whatever reason feels compelled to tell them all about it [again]. In the second dream he tells them the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to him. Naturally his family rebuked him for telling this dream as well, and the brothers really, really hate him now (probably all the more so because they are the sons of a usurper, so they are a little leery of it maybe happening again). In hindsight, it might have been smarter for Joseph to keep all those dreams to himself, but he didn't.

The brothers decide that they absolutely don't want to see those dreams come true, and they are convinced that the only way to make sure it doesn't happen is to kill the guy. So the brothers go out into the fields with their flocks, and Israel decides to send Joseph out to them. He found them at Dothan, and when they saw him coming they conspired to kill him. They decided to throw him into one of the pits and tell their father that a wild animal killed him. But when Ruben (the actual first born son) heard the plan he tried to temper it. He told them not to kill him, instead to just throw him into the pit. Ruben then planned to rescue him and return him to their father. Ruben, as the first born, was the responsible, dutiful son. He didn't want any bloodshed. So when he got there, that's what the brothers did. They stripped off his fancy robe and threw him in the pit, then they sat down and had some lunch. About that time though there was a caravan of Ishmaelites rumbling along from Gilead, and Judah (the fourth brother) realizes they're on a trade route, and eureka, he decides instead of killing Joseph they should sell him and get some money out of the deal. They pull Joseph up out of the pit and sell him to the Ishmaelites for 20 pieces of silver.

Ruben comes back to rescue Joseph and sees that Joseph is no longer in the pit and he tears his clothes as a sign of repentance or mourning. He asks the other brothers what is to be done now, and the brothers decide to take the fancy embroidered tunic and tear it up a little, and spear rams blood on it and tell their father that Joseph was killed by wild animals. This wasn't really unbelievable back then, it happened all the time. They didn't have guns, they had spears and a bag of rocks and a sling to protect themselves. Needless to say, Israel was very distraught about the loss of Joseph. Though the other sons tried to comfort him, Israel insisted that he would meet Joseph in Sheol still mourning him. Back then, they didn't believe particularly in heaven or hell yet, but sheol was a place they thought people went to after they die. Just like we use the word heaven to create a sort of pictorial image of where we think people go when they die, or the word hell to create an image for us of where evil people go after death, the people of Israel used the word Sheol as a sort of pictorial word to give them an image of where people go after they die.

In the Jewish faith there is no afterlife. Not just at the beginning but also now, there is no idea that there is a life after death. The idea comes into the intellectual conversation in the very last year of the old testament in 167, but it's never adopted by Judaism. Judaism is not a faith that is proclaiming eternal life, or salvation, or the resurrection of the dead or anything like that. To the Jewish people, the future is only the future of the people, once you're dead your part of the future is over. That's why the holocaust was so bad and painful to them, not just because six million people died, but because six million bits of their future were wiped out. For them to have lost so much of their future was a double blow.

Now we can skip ahead to chapter 39, because the section before is just transitional and a little x-rated. You can read it on your own if you'd really like to. It deals with Joseph's brother Judah and his hi-jinx.

In chapter 39, we see that Joseph was taken down to Egypt and was purchased as a slave by the captain of Pharaoh's guard. We're told that the Lord was with Joseph, and whenever the bible tells us that the Lord is with someone, we know he's a man of charisma. Having the Lord with him accounts for his charisma. How else would it be that out of nowhere a great man arises? And now we're going to see three times Joseph is going to overcome adversity.

First we read, in chapter 39, that the Lord was with Joseph when he was with his master, Potiphar (the captain of the guard), and everything he did turned out well. Potiphar trusted him and put him in charge of all that he had. All the while Joseph was there the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake. But now Joseph gets in a little bit of hot water, because he was a good-looking guy, and Potiphar's wife takes a shine to him. She tries to get him in bed with her, and Joseph turns her down. He explains that he couldn't do such a wicked thing, even though she coaxed him again and again. Then she tries again a little more forcefully, and Joseph wriggles out of the cloak she's got in her clutches and runs away. When Potiphar comes home the wife holds up the cloak and tells him Joseph tried to take advantage of her, and here's his cloak to prove it (though seriously, he must have known she was a little bit of a tramp and just didn't want to believe it, because how does just having the guys cloak prove anything?). So Potiphar has Joseph thrown in prison.

Ordinarily that would be a pretty bad thing - given the state of prisons back then - but as we've seen the Lord was with Joseph, and again everything he touched prospered and he was very trustworthy. So we're going to see him immediately rise to the fore. Soon he was put in charge of all the prisoners by the chief jailer. The chief jailer paid no heed to anything, because he knew the Lord was with Joseph. After a time, the cup bearer of the king of Egypt, and the baker of the King of Egypt found themselves thrown in prison over some slight or other. They both begin to have these dreams, and Joseph - who has already shown himself to be one who *has* portentous dreams - now shows himself to be one who can interpret portentous dreams as well. In chapter 40:5, they both have a dream, and when Joseph got to them in the morning, he could see they were troubled and asked why. They both told him that they'd had these creepy dreams, and Joseph says bring it on, tell me what they were and I'll interpret them.

The cup bearer tells him he dreamed that there was a vine before him, and on the vine there were three branches, and on each branch there was a bud that blossomed and then bunches of grapes ripened from them. He said he dreamed that he took the grapes and filled a cup and so on. Joseph tells him that the three branches are three days, and that within three days the king will restore him to his position. He then asks the cup bearer to remember him when he is restored to his position, and to make mention of him to Pharaoh so that he could possibly get out of jail also. The cupbearer says he will, but he apparently has a bad memory.

The baker also had a dream, and he told it to Joseph as well. In his dream, there were three cake baskets on the baker's head, and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head. Joseph had a slightly less good interpretation for the baker. He

told him that the three cake baskets also referred to three days, but that at the end of three days the Pharaoh would take off the baker's head, hang it on a poll and let the birds eat at his head.

True to Joseph's word, everything he said came true, and the cupbearer was lifted back up to his former position and the baker was beheaded. Not true to *his* word, the cupbearer forgets about Joseph altogether. Later though, the Pharaoh begins to have creepy dreams, and then all of a sudden his memory is jogged.

In chapter 41, we're told about Pharaoh's dreams: Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, and behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows attractive and plump, and they fed in the reed grass. And behold, seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. And the ugly, thin cows ate up the seven attractive, plump cows. And Pharaoh awoke. And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time. And behold, seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. And behold, after them sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind. And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump, full ears.

Pharaoh was very troubled by these dreams and wanted to know what they meant. He asked all the smartest guys around him and they all seemed to just shrug their shoulders and not know what to think. That was when the cupbearer remembered Joseph, still sitting in prison. Pharaoh sent for Joseph and asked him to interpret the dreams for him. Joseph told him that the dreams meant that there would be seven years of prosperity and plenty, and then seven years of famine, and Joseph takes the opportunity to offer Pharaoh some advice. He tells him to find a guy who is discerning and wise to oversee the land for the next seven years and take one fifth of the produce every year and stockpile it for when the famine comes. Apparently this really appealed to Pharaoh, because he made Joseph the overseer for all the land. So here we see Joseph's third rise. First he rose in Potiphar's house, and then he rose in the jail, and now he's risen in the administration of the Pharaoh. He's been made the prime minister of Egypt. Now as Pharaoh makes him prime minister, he also sort of Egyptianizes him, changes his name, gives him an Egyptian wife, etc. which makes it hard for his brothers to recognize him when they encounter him later.

We're going to stop here, and know that next time we're going to pick up where Jacob/Israel sends his remaining sons to beg for food in Egypt because of the famine. Believe it or not we're nearly done with this, and next time we'll get into Exodus, which is sort of getting out of the frying pan and into the fire, but such is life.