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A Biographical Study of Jacob

Harold Willmington

Liberty University, hwillmington@liberty.edu

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Jacob

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

- I. Jacob, the younger twin
 - A. His birth was God's answer to Isaac's and Rebekah's prayer concerning children (Gen. 25:21-23).
 - 1. God told them two nations were in Rebekah's womb.
 - 2. One nation would be stronger than the other.
 - 3. The older twin would serve the younger twin.
 - B. Jacob was thus the second born of twins (Gen. 25:24-26).
 - C. He was born with his hand grasping Esau's heel (Gen. 25:26).
- II. Jacob, the devising brother
 - A. In contrast to Esau, who was an outdoorsman and a hunter, Jacob grew up a quiet man, staying among the tents (Gen. 25:27).
 - B. Jacob persuaded his famished brother Esau, who was returning from a hunting trip, to sell him the firstborn birthright for some bread and lentil stew (Gen. 25:29-34).
- III. Jacob, the deceitful son
 - A. He was persuaded by Rebekah to assume the identity of Esau so that he might deceive and obtain from his dim-eyed father the patriarchal blessing (Gen. 27:5-13).
 - B. Rebekah dressed him in Esau's clothes, covering his hands and the smooth part of his neck with goat skins (Gen. 27:14-16).
 - C. Jacob successfully deceived Isaac and received the following patriarchal blessing (Gen. 27:17-30):
 - 1. He would become a prosperous man.
 - 2. Esau's descendants would serve his descendants.
 - 3. Other nations would serve him.
 - 4. God would bless those who befriended him and curse those who did not.
- IV. The dreaming traveler
 - A. The vision of Jacob
 - 1. He saw the angels of the Lord.
 - a. Upon realizing that Esau planned to kill Jacob, Isaac and Rebekah sent Jacob away (Gen. 27:41—28:5).
 - (1) They warned him not to marry a Canaanite woman.
 - (2) They advised him to find a wife in the city of Nahor, among Rebekah's relatives.
 - b. God appeared to Jacob en route to Nahor.
 - c. In a dream he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending on it (Gen. 28:10-12).

2. He saw the Lord of the angels (Gen. 28:13-15)—God at this time reaffirmed to Jacob (as he had previously done for Isaac) the threefold features of the Abrahamic Covenant.
 - a. The first feature dealt with the soil; that is, God would give the land of Canaan to Jacob’s descendants.
 - b. The second feature dealt with the seed; that is, God would make of Jacob a great nation.
 - c. The third feature dealt with a Savior; that is, someday the Messiah would come and bless all nations.

B. The vow of Jacob (Gen. 28:16-22)

1. Upon awakening, Jacob took the stone he had used as a pillow, poured oil upon it, and set it up as a pillar to God.
2. He then named that place Beth-el, meaning “house of God.”
3. He promised that if God would protect and bless him, he would serve God and give back a tenth of all he possessed.

V. Jacob, the love-struck groom

A. His love for Rachel

1. Jacob arrived in Nahor of Pandanaram (Gen. 29:1-4)
2. He met Rachel, daughter of Laban, the brother of his mother Rebekah (Gen. 29:5-13).
 - a. She arrived at a well to water her father’s sheep.
 - b. Jacob rolled a huge stone away from the entrance of the well for her.
3. Jacob then asked Laban that he be allowed to marry Rachel, agreeing to work seven years for her (Gen. 29:15-21).

B. His labor for Rachel

1. The diligence of Jacob—“Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her” (Gen. 29:20).
2. The deception by Laban
 - a. Laban deceived Jacob on the wedding night, substituting Leah, Rachel’s older sister, for Rachel (Gen. 29:22-23).
 - b. An angry Jacob confronted Laban the following morning (Gen. 29:25).
 - c. Laban “explained” it was not their custom to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one (Gen. 29:26).
 - d. He then proposed the following (Gen. 29:27):
 - (1) That Jacob fulfill Leah’s one-week-long bridal celebration
 - (2) That Laban would then give Rachel to Jacob
 - (3) That Jacob would, however, agree to work yet another seven years for Rachel

e. Jacob agreed and continued yet another seven years (Gen. 29:28-30).

VI. Jacob, the fruitful family man

A. Jacob fathered his first four sons through Leah.

1. Reuben (Gen. 29:32)
2. Simeon (Gen. 29:33)
3. Levi (Gen. 29:34)
4. Judah (Gen. 29:35)

B. The barren and desperate Rachel presented her maidservant Bilhah to Jacob, hoping this girl could bear children for her. Bilhah gave birth to two sons, Jacob's fifth and sixth.

1. Dan (Gen. 30:6)
2. Naphtali (Gen. 30:8)

C. Leah did the same thing, giving her maidservant Zilpah to Jacob. Through her he fathered his seventh and eighth sons.

1. Gad (Gen. 30:11)
2. Asher (Gen. 30:13)

D. Leah then resumed childbearing and presented Jacob with sons number nine and ten, plus his only recorded daughter.

1. Issachar (Gen. 30:18)
2. Zebulun (Gen. 30:20)
3. Dinah (Gen. 30:21)

E. At long last, Rachel gave birth to a son, Joseph (Gen. 30:24)

VII. Jacob, the enterprising employee

A. Jacob and Laban—the suggestion

1. Jacob planned to leave for Canaan, but was persuaded by Laban to continue working for him as a flock tender (Gen. 30:25-30).
2. Laban agreed to give Jacob all the speckled and spotted lambs, sheep and goats for his personal possessions (Gen. 30:31-42).
3. Jacob's herds multiplied quickly, making him a very rich man (Gen. 30:43).

B. Jacob and Laban—the separation (Gen. 31:1-42)

1. The reasons for this separation—After working for Laban 20 years, three factors prompted Jacob to return to Canaan (Gen. 31:1-18):
 - a. A growing hostility between himself, Laban, and Laban's sons
 - b. A revelation from God, instructing Jacob to return to Canaan
 - c. The support of his wives, who encouraged him to return
2. The reunion following this separation (Gen. 31:19-42)
 - a. The frustration of Laban
 - (1) Three days after Jacob had left, Laban discovered Jacob was gone.

- (2) After a seven-day chase, he caught up with his son-in-law in Gilead, that land east of the Jordan River.
- (3) Laban was furious at Jacob for two reasons:
 - (a) First, because his son-in-law had left without telling him
 - (b) Second, because he incorrectly assumed Jacob had stolen his household gods. (Actually, Rachel had taken them without Jacob's knowledge.)
- b. The revelation to Laban—God appeared to Laban in a dream, warning him not to harm Jacob.
- c. The confrontation by Laban
 - (1) Jacob was rebuked for his abrupt departure and was accused of stealing Laban's household gods.
 - (2) Jacob denied this and allowed Laban to search through the camp.
 - (3) Laban failed to find them, for Rachel had hidden them inside her camel's saddle and was sitting upon them.
- d. The explanation to Laban—Jacob said one of the key reasons he left was the fact that Laban had changed his wages 10 times during the 20 years he was employed by Laban.

C. Jacob and Laban—the symbol (Gen. 31:43-55)

- 1. The nature of this covenant—At Laban's demand, he and Jacob entered into an agreement involving the following points:
 - a. That God would punish Jacob if he ever mistreated Laban's daughters
 - b. That neither man would cross over a designed boundary line to harm the other
- 2. The symbol of this covenant—It consisted of a heap of stones.
- 3. The place of this covenant—It was called Mizpah, meaning "watchtower."

VIII. Jacob, the determined wrestler (Gen. 32:1-32)

A. His communion with God

- 1. The preparation—After being visited by the angels of God, Jacob learned that his brother Esau was riding to meet him with 400 men. He immediately did two things.
 - a. He divided his camp—In great fear, Jacob divided his camp into two groups so that if Esau attacked one group, the other could escape.
 - b. He delivered his bribe—Jacob instructed his servants to ride out and present the following to Esau: 200 female goats; 20 male goats; 200 ewes; 20 rams; 30 female camels with their young; 40 cows; 10 bulls; 20 female donkeys; and 10 male donkeys.
- 2. The supplication
 - a. Jacob spoke to God and cried out for deliverance from Esau.
 - b. Jacob struggled with God.

- (1) The place—It was near the brook Jabbok, later named Peniel by Jacob, meaning “Seeing God face to face.”
 - (2) The persistence—Jacob refused to let go of God until he was blessed.
 - (3) The pronouncement—God changed Jacob’s name to Israel, meaning “he who struggles with God.”
 - (4) The proof—God touched the socket of Jacob’s hip, causing him to limp. He never walked the same again after this wrestling session with the Lord.
- B. His reunion with Esau—To Jacob’s great relief, the meeting between him and Esau proved to be a very friendly one (Gen. 33:1-6).
- IX. Jacob, the obedient patriarch
- A. The required rendezvous of Jacob—He was ordered back to Beth-el by God (Gen. 35:1-15).
 - B. The rededication of Jacob
 1. He ordered his household to give up their foreign gods, to purify themselves, and to change their clothes.
 2. He built an altar at Beth-el and called it El-beth-el, meaning “the God of God’s house.”
 - C. The revelation to Jacob—God once again confirmed the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant to Jacob.
- X. Jacob, the brokenhearted
- A. Over the failure of his sons and the defilement of his daughter
 1. The defilement of Dinah—His daughter was sexually violated by a Hivite pagan name Shechem (Gen. 34:1-2).
 2. Murder on the part of Simeon and Levi (Gen. 34:3-31)
 - a. These two brothers tricked the Hivites into circumcising themselves as a condition for any future marriages between them and the Israelites.
 - b. On the third day when the Hivites were swollen and helpless, Simeon and Levi slaughtered them like wild animals.
 3. Adultery on the part of Reuben—Reuben slept with Bilhah, one of Jacob’s wives (Gen. 35:22).
 4. Deceit and treachery on the part of his 10 sons
 - a. The 10 sons and Joseph (Gen. 37:1-36)
 - (1) Jacob made a brightly colored coat for his favorite son, Joseph.
 - (2) He later gently rebuked his favorite son, however, for relating the unlikely details of two of his dreams in which Jacob, Rachel, and his brothers would someday bow down to him.
 - (3) Jacob sent Joseph to check on the welfare of his 10 half-brothers who were out tending their father’s sheep.

- (4) After finding his half-brothers, Joseph was sold into slavery by them and taken to Egypt.
- (5) Jacob was then deceived by his 10 sons into believing Joseph had been killed and eaten by a wild animal.
- (6) He was grief-stricken and could not be comforted.
- b. The 10 sons and Benjamin (Gen. 42:1—43:15)
 - (1) Jacob sent his 10 sons to Egypt during a famine to buy food.
 - (2) He refused, however, to allow his youngest son, Benjamin, to go lest he suffer harm.
 - (3) Upon their return, the 10 brothers told Jacob about the strange food administrator they had met in Egypt, not realizing this powerful man was Joseph.
 - (4) They related how he at first had accused them of being spies, that he had taken Simeon as hostage, and then demanded Benjamin be brought with them during their next trip to buy food.
 - (5) Jacob at first refused to listen, concluding everything had turned against him, as he had lost both Simeon and Joseph.
- B. Over the funerals of his wife, his wife's nurse, and his father
 - 1. Rebekah his wife (Gen. 35:16-19)
 - a. She had died giving birth to Benjamin.
 - b. Jacob buried her in or near the little town of Bethlehem.
 - 2. Deborah, the nurse of his wife (Gen. 35:8)
 - 3. Isaac, his father (Gen. 35:27-29)
- XI. Jacob, the overjoyed father (Gen. 45:25—47:10)
 - A. An amazed and overjoyed Jacob learned his beloved son Joseph was not only alive, but was second in command over all the land of Egypt.
 - B. En route to Egypt to meet Joseph, Jacob was visited by God, who appeared to him at Beer-sheba.
 - C. God promised to bless Jacob in Egypt and someday bring his descendants back to Canaan.
 - D. Jacob arrived in Egypt with his family clan of 70 and was joyfully and tearfully reunited with Joseph.
 - E. Jacob met and blessed the pharaoh. At this time the old patriarch was 130.
- XII. Jacob, the dying prophet
 - A. The prophet and his two grandsons (Gen. 48:1-20)
 - 1. After living in Egypt for 17 years, Jacob realized his life was drawing to a close and called for Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to be brought to him that he might bless them.

2. He then blessed them and predicted that Ephraim (the younger grandson) would become greater than Manasseh, the firstborn.
- B. The prophet and his 12 sons (Gen. 49:1-28)
1. Jacob's revelation concerning them—The old patriarch historically reviewed and prophetically previewed their lives and the tribes they would found.
 - a. Reuben (Gen. 49:3-4)—Reuben was rebuked for his unruliness and immorality and was demoted from the position of being Jacob's firstborn.
 - b. Simeon and Levi (Gen. 49:5-7)—They were also rebuked for their uncontrolled anger and cruelty.
 - c. Judah (Gen. 49:8-12)
 - (1) His brothers would praise him.
 - (2) He would destroy his enemies as a lion would.
 - (3) From his tribe the Messiah (Shiloh) would someday come.
 - d. Zebulun (Gen. 49:13)—His people would dwell on the shores of the sea and offer harbors for ships.
 - e. Issachar (Gen. 49:14-15)—His people would lovingly and diligently till the ground.
 - f. Dan (Gen. 49:16-18)—His tribe would be known for its treachery.
 - g. Gad (Gen. 49:19)
 - (1) He would be attacked by a band of raiders.
 - (2) He would counterattack them at their heels.
 - h. Asher (Gen. 49:20)—His people would produce rich food, fit for kings.
 - i. Naphtali (Gen. 49:21)—His tribe would be as a deer let loose, producing lovely fawns.
 - j. Joseph (Gen. 49:22-26)
 - (1) He was like a fruitful tree beside a fountain, whose branches shade the wall, extending over it.
 - (2) Although he had suffered persecution, the mighty Rock of Israel would protect and abundantly bless him.
 - k. Benjamin (Gen. 49:27)—He was as a wild wolf that prowled, devouring his enemies in the morning and dividing the spoils in the evening.
 2. Jacob's death (Gen. 49:29—50:13)
 - a. He desired that after death his body be carried back to Canaan and buried in the cave of Machpelah alongside Abraham, Isaac, Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah.
 - b. At the age of 147 Jacob died (Gen. 47:28).
 - c. His embalming process required 40 days.
 - d. After this came a 70-day period of national mourning.
 - e. He was then carried into Canaan by his 12 sons.

THEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

- I. Both Joshua and Samuel referred to Jacob during their final addresses to the elders of Israel.
- II. Malachi contrasted Jacob with Esau to illustrate God's love toward Israel (Mal. 1:2-3).
- III. Paul contrasted Jacob with Esau to prove God's sovereignty (Rom. 9:13).
- IV. Matthew and Luke included his name in their genealogies.
 - A. Matthew did this as he traced the line of Christ through Solomon, the son of David (Matt. 1:2).
 - B. Luke did this as he traced the line of Christ through Nathan, another son of David (Luke 3:34).
- V. Jesus referred to Jacob on several occasions.
 - A. To emphasize the salvation of all believing Gentiles (Matt. 8:11)
 - B. To emphasize the fact that all departed believers are now conscious and in God's presence (Matt. 22:29-32)
- VI. The Samaritan woman asked Jesus if he was greater than Jacob (John 4:12).
- VII. Stephen referred to Jacob six times during his defense before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:8, 12, 14-15, 32, 46).
 - A. The fact that he fathered 12 sons
 - B. The fact that he sent those sons to Egypt for food
 - C. The fact that he himself later moved to Egypt
- VIII. The book of Hebrews speaks of Jacob's faith.
 - A. In living a simple life in tents while awaiting his heavenly home (Heb. 11:9)
 - B. In blessing Joseph's two sons and predicting their future (Heb. 11:21)

STATISTICS

Father: Isaac (Gen. 25:21-26)

Mother: Rebekah (Gen. 25:21-26)

Spouses: Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah (Gen. 29:23, 28; 30:4, 9)

Sons: From Leah: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun (Gen. 29:32-35; 30:18-20).

From Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin (Gen. 30:22-24; 35:16-18)

From Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali (Gen. 30:5-8)

From Zilpah: Gad and Asher (Gen. 30:10, 13)

Daughter: Dinah (Gen. 30:21)

Brother: Esau (Gen. 25:25)

First mention: Genesis 25:26

Final mention: Hebrews 11:21

Meaning of his name: "Following after, supplanter"

Frequency of his name: Referred to 252 times

Biblical books mentioning him: 16 books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, 1 Samuel, 2 Kings, Malachi, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, Hebrews)

Place of death: Egypt (Gen. 49:33—50:3)

Age at death: 147 (Gen. 47:28)

Important fact about his life: He fathered 12 sons, who later founded Israel's 12 tribes (1 Chron. 2-8)