
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

LECTURE 6: PATRIARCHS I

Lecture Presenter: Robert D. McCurley M.Div.



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Rev. Robert McCurley is the minister of the Gospel at Greenville Presbyterian Church in Greenville, SC, a congregation of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). www.freechurchcontinuing.org

Module

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

30 LECTURES

ROBERT D. McCURLEY M.Div.

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- 6. Patriarchs I**
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Lecture 6

PATRIARCHS I

Lecture Theme:

God's promise unfolds through many twists and turns, revealing bright revelations of God's glory and his plan of redemption.

Text:

“Who are the Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom. 9:4–5).

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 6

When you read God's description of the Patriarchs in Hebrews 11, they sound like contemporary Christians. That is because there is one people of God, united under one Covenant of Grace and one Savior, throughout all history. We are connected to these fathers in one body, which is exactly what God states in the last verse of Hebrews 11, in verse 40 and into the beginning of chapter 12. Now, this of course confirms what we saw about our relationship to Abraham in the previous lecture. Hebrews 11 says, over and over and over again, “by faith,” “by faith,” “by faith.” “By faith Abel,” “By faith Enoch,” “By faith Noah,” and so on. They were men of faith, believers in the promises of God. They lived in the covenant and kept covenant, and they were agents of God's blessings.

So, what are the implications of this? Well, if you are a believer, the Old Testament provides a detailed account of your own family's history. You're reading the heritage of your spiritual family. More importantly, you read about the Lord, God's revelation of Himself and the salvation of His people. The period of the Patriarchs tells us of the unfolding promise and covenant of God. So, what is the theological significance, for example, of Sodom and Gomorrah? And how does it provide a pattern for biblical history? Why does Abraham die with little property after being promised a great land? How does Isaac teach us of Christ to come? What do we learn from Jacob about the doctrine of election? Why is Joseph so concerned about the burial of his bones on his deathbed? And lastly, how does the Covenant of Grace tie together Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the 12 tribes, Christ, and every Christian today?

In this lecture, we will expound some of the theological themes woven throughout the period of the Patriarchs. We will trace the unfolding of God's promise and consider the special ways in which Christ revealed Himself and His salvation. Let's begin where we left off with Abraham in our last lecture. Another event in his life that becomes a dominant theological theme in the remainder of Scripture relates to Sodom and Gomorrah. The

destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah shows God's anger, His wrath, His fury that is kindled against wickedness. God's judgment left the three cities wasted, desolate. The Bible says, full of brimstone, salt, and burning. And it left them without a single inhabitant. You'll remember, of course, about Lot, who fled from Sodom, and the New Testament tells us, "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). She is an example of unbelief and disobedience. But the greatest sin to ignite God's fury was Sodom and Gomorrah's breach of the first commandment: Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. This is brought out in the prophets in a number of places.

Their gross perversion and immorality, which is what we think of, actually reflected a deeper spiritual adultery that brought their destruction. And God uses this revelation of Himself in dealing with them in righteous indignation and wrath as a model for the rest of history. In Deuteronomy 29 verse 23, God uses the example of Sodom and Gomorrah to warn Israel of what will happen to them if they break God's covenant. He says they will reap God's curses. Later on, God confronts Israel with this same image of Sodom and Gomorrah, this same warning. In fact, in Isaiah 1:10, He refers to Israel as Sodom and Gomorrah, and you see this further in places like Jeremiah, and more particularly in chapters 49 and 50, but it goes on. He says that He will do the same thing to the nation of Babylon in Isaiah 13. And then, in the New Testament, this theme continues. In Jude 7, God uses Sodom and Gomorrah to describe the wickedness of those that are mentioned in that text.

Even into Revelation chapter 11, the symbol of spiritual Babylon is called Sodom. But you should also notice that God's declaration that there were not enough righteous men in Sodom and Gomorrah to spare them from His judgment occurs right after the promise that Sarah will conceive and bear a son of promise, through whom God would provide a Savior in the face of judgment. When you come to the end of Abraham's life, where we're told (and we're told in several places) that he is a stranger and a sojourner, he received promises from God by faith, but when he died, the only land he possessed was a field and a cave for the burial of his wife Sarah. The fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham must continue to unfold. And that brings us, secondly, to Isaac.

From Abraham's loins, Isaac was appointed by God as the chosen son of promise. We're told in Genesis 18 in verse 19, "For I know him," that is Abraham, "that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." And this is exactly what Abraham did, he commanded his whole household. We'll see the fruit of that in Isaac, but you see it, for example, in his servants as well. Remember the account of Abraham sending his servant to a far distance to fetch a wife for his son Isaac. And, in the description that's given to us, the servant is obviously honoring not only Abraham, but the Lord, in all that he does.

In Genesis 26 verses 3 and 4, God repeats to Isaac all of the important elements of the covenant with Abraham, and tells Isaac that this covenant continues with him. So, you notice, the same Covenant of Grace is continuing from generation to generation, beginning in Genesis 3:15, through Noah, through Abraham, now to Isaac; and as we will see, it will continue to go on from there. But you should stop for just a moment and think with me because Scripture is a masterpiece. It provides us with an exciting treasure hunt, if you will. But you have to know, and you have to pay close attention to the details. Details are very important. You'll need to recognize the details of Genesis, really in order to understand the rest of the Bible. It's all tied together as one large story. So, let me provide just a single example for you.

Think with me of the seemingly insignificant details like the children born to various individuals: can this really be that important for understanding the Bible and its theology? Well, these sons end up becoming future people groups and nations, and knowing who is who is essential for understanding all that; you'll read, for example, in the prophets. We're told in Genesis that Ishmael will be the head of a family of 12 princes and become a great nation. The two incestuous sons of Lot become the Moabites and the Ammonites. God says, with regards to Jacob and Esau, that two nations were at war in the womb. Esau of course becomes the nation of Edom. And all of this is woven into, for example, the legislation in the law, the different categories of people; and the spiritual significance is expounded throughout the prophets.

This information has huge ramifications. The same could be said for the location of wells, and altars, and many other places which are alluded to later in the Bible. As with many of the lectures in this course, we must consider a vast time period in the material that is before us, where we're trying to consider everything from Abraham to Joseph. So, there are many important details that we must pass over, limiting ourselves to a few

main points. But remember that the purpose of this course is to provide you with some basic tools and training to equip you for your ongoing study of the Scriptures.

We especially find in Isaac the redemptive theme of submission, submission of a son to a father, and of Isaac, ultimately, to the Lord. You know that he willingly carried the wood to Mount Moriah. He willingly laid down his life on the altar. Remember that at this point, Abraham is elderly, and Isaac could have resisted him, but he didn't. At age 40, he submitted to his father in receiving the bride that his father had chosen. Now, all of this points us, of course, finally to the ultimate Son of Promise, to the Lord Jesus Christ, Who willingly and voluntarily shoulders the cross, and Who freely gives Himself and lays down His life on behalf of His people. His life was never taken from Him. It wasn't taken from Him by the Jews or Pilot or the soldiers or anyone else. And then in John 17, Christ speaks again of receiving His bride, the Church, as those whom the Father had given Him. All of this is illustrated in the life of Isaac, who demonstrates this theological theme of submission.

Thirdly, we need to consider Jacob. From Isaac, Jacob was chosen. Now, when you turn to Genesis 28 verses 13 to 15, we see a description of the Promised Land that God gives to Jacob, and it's interesting because it's really the same promise that God gave to Abraham in chapter 17, to Isaac in chapter 26, and now to Jacob in chapter 28. In verse 20, Jacob responds to this, and the word "if" can also be translated "when." In other words, we have to be clear in our minds that Jacob's response to God's promises and to the confirmation of His covenant is really a response of faith. He receives the promise with faith and responds with obedience to God. In the next two chapters, in chapters 29 and 30, God goes on to bless Jacob again.

All along, God is controlling the unfolding of His sovereign plan. In Jacob, the doctrine of election is especially highlighted. And we know this from the New Testament because when we turn to Romans chapter 9:10-13, we read about it. It says, "When Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (for the children being not yet born neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, 'The elder shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated.'" Paul writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to the church of Rome is going back to the same account of Jacob and Esau in the book of Genesis. And he's saying, 'We find here the doctrine of election.' The doctrine of election teaches, as we saw in an earlier lecture, that God is the One Who is sovereign and that He chooses, out of His own good pleasure, a people that He will save for Himself. And He chooses, correspondingly, those who will be left under the condemnation of His wrath in hell. Jacob and Esau, as Romans 9 tells us, had not done anything, there was nothing in them, that determined God's choice. The choice fell within the counsel of God Himself.

The prophets proclaim the same message. Isaiah refers repeatedly to God's people as 'Jacob my servant' and 'Israel my elect.' Interestingly, the same language is applied to the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, in Isaiah 42, in the opening of that chapter (verse 1) we read, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth," referring to the Lord Jesus. Now, Esau is an example of a covenant breaker. He had received the sign of the promise; he was circumcised. He had all of the benefits that had come to him as a result of being in the covenant, but we're told that he despised his birthright and God's blessing. And so, he traded it for a single meal. His earthly appetite was far greater than his appetite for spiritual things, for heavenly things. In the book of Hebrews 12:15-17, the author of Hebrews reaches back again into this story with regard to Esau and uses it as a warning to those within the New Testament church. That passage says, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

You'll remember that in this Covenant of Grace, there are both blessings and curses, and it corresponds to covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking. Esau is subjected to the curse that comes to those who forsake and despise God's covenant blessings. Esau goes on, of course, and disobeys his father and marries Ishmael's daughter, violating God's requirement of separation and His prohibition of intermarrying with those from outside His people among the seed of the serpent.

On the other hand, we have Jacob. Jacob received from Isaac the covenant blessings that came from God through Abraham. As we saw in Genesis 28, God confirms this Himself. And we see it especially in a dream, and

the dream, perhaps, is well known to you. God confirms this Himself in a dream regarding a ladder that reached from Earth to Heaven with angels ascending and descending on it, and as Jacob looks, Jehovah manifests Himself above, at the top of the ladder. And it is the God of Jacob's fathers that is manifest. And He repeats Abraham's promise to him of a land and of a seed and of blessing, which we saw in the previous lecture. Jacob calls the place Bethel, which means 'the House of God', 'the Gate of Heaven'. And, he was, of course, pointing beyond that little place; he was pointing beyond the land, ultimately, to what the land represents in the promise, ultimately the inheritance of God's people in heaven. Well, this dream would become a reality in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, in His incarnation. The Lord Jesus is the true house of God. He is Emmanuel, God with us.

And you'll notice how this comes out in the gospel of John chapter 1:51. Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see Heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." And so, the Lord Jesus Christ is demonstrating the connection between what we see in Genesis 28 and Himself. In Genesis 32, the Angel of the Lord, whom we'll learn more about in the next lecture, appears to Jacob and wrestles with him. And within the context of that grappling match, Jacob says, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me" (verse 26). What's happening? He is still clinging to the promises of God in Christ, and he receives the blessing. And he calls the name of that place Peniel, which means 'the face of God' because he had come, as it were, face to face with the Lord. And, it is at that place that Jacob receives his new name, which was 'Israel.' Israel means 'one who prevails with the power of a prince,' one who prevails with God. And, as you should know, his new name, Israel, ends up becoming the name of the whole nation, all of his seed, which will grow into a great body that is greater in number than all the stars in the heavens. That brings us, fourthly, to Jacob's twelve sons, those who become the heads of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel.

To Jacob is born these twelve sons. It's interesting that when you move ahead into the New Testament, almost to the end of the Bible, the second to last chapter, in Revelation 21, we have this description of the people of God in heaven. And, it describes the new Jerusalem, and it descends from heaven, and it is a Bride adorned for her Husband and so on. And the Lord reveals some things to us about the nature of this new Jerusalem. And, He tells us in chapter 21 of Revelation, that it has 12 gates with the names of the 12 tribes written upon [them]. Once again, we're seeing the people of God in the Old Testament and New Testament joining together. Well, of these twelve sons, one son, Judah, has twins through Tamar. Tamar, at the time, was pretending to be a harlot. And, one of those twins is called Pharez, which means, 'a breach,' [which is] interesting again because when you come to the prophets, the Lord Jesus is described as the 'Repairer of the Breach.' But, this is the direct lineage to David. Ten generations later, David appears in this line, and then, of course, through him to the Lord Jesus Christ. And all of this is actually spelled out for us in the first chapter of the New Testament, in Matthew chapter 1. In Genesis 49:10, God makes clear that the line leading to the Mediator, the Messiah, the Christ, will come through Judah. It says, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." This is a reference pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ, Who again is described in Revelation 5:5 as the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David. He is also described as the Lamb Who was slain, a suffering Servant.

At the end of Genesis, we have a whole section devoted to the remarkable story of Jacob's eleventh son, Joseph. He was the firstborn by his favorite wife Rachel. God's promise to Abraham, and to Isaac, and to Jacob is worked out in and through the life of Joseph. The story of Joseph is also full of beautiful portrayals of Christ and of His redemption. Joseph serves as a picture of the Mediator, a type of Christ, if you will. It's through Joseph that His people are kept alive. And you'll know, of course, if you've read the story of Joseph, there are many ups and downs in that story, many twists and turns, many dark providences. It doesn't look, at several points in that account, as if all is going to turn out well, but when he gets to the end in Genesis 50, Joseph tells his brothers that what they meant for evil in selling him into slavery, God intended for good. Indeed, He did. All of the difficulties and all of the trials that had accompanied his life were the very means that God used to ultimately bring about the salvation of the seed of the woman and the salvation of the whole family, and ultimately, preserve the twelve tribes of Israel in the centuries that would follow.

But the book of Genesis closes with Jacob and his sons outside the Promised Land. They've gone from Goshen and sought refuge within Egypt. Now, we know that God's word to Abraham all the way back in Genesis 15:13 was to be fulfilled. God said, "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall

serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years.” What does that mean? Well, it means that the end of the book of Genesis, the twelve sons of Jacob are staring into the face of 400 years of bondage in Egypt. Well, that’s a pretty bleak picture.

But I want you to notice the second to last verse in the book of Genesis. That’s chapter 50 and verse 25. Because even in those circumstances that we’ve just described, Joseph proclaimed that God would yet visit His people. And he commanded his sons and those that would come after him that they must carry up his bones from Egypt and take them back to be buried in the promised land of Goshen. Do you see what’s happening here? Even against the black backdrop, if you will, Joseph is still clinging by faith to the unfolding of God’s promise, and God says so in Hebrews 11:22, “By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.” The Lord is putting, once again, significance into this little detail that is so easy for us to pass over. Now, if you read ahead and go from Genesis to Joshua 24, you’ll find in verse 32 that the nation of Israel did exactly what Joseph asked. When they fled during the time of the Exodus, they took Joseph’s bones with them. And when they eventually, well over four hundred years later, found themselves in the Promised Land, they buried him in Shechem.

Now, that’s significant. Why is that significant? Why does the Lord highlight these sorts of details (most of which we’re not able to consider in this lecture)? Well, it comes back again to the promise. Right? We have a promise of seed. We have a promise of land. We have a promise of blessing that God has given to Abraham and his posterity. That land, as Hebrews 11 makes clear, served as a vivid picture, and the patriarchs knew it. It’s not just that we read this back into the Old Testament. Hebrews 11 makes clear [that] they saw this. That land was not just a piece of geography, or a piece of real estate, if you will. Rather, it was a tangible picture of what they knew was the ultimate fulfillment of promise in the inheritance God would give them in a heavenly country, in something far better. We’re actually going to look at this in detail when we come to the lecture entitled, “Inheritance,” but we see it already here. We see Joseph recognizes he needs to be planted, he needs to be buried, in the land of Promise because of all the significance that that has attached to it.

Well, in summary, we go back to Hebrews 11 and the end of that chapter and the beginning of chapter 12, which I mentioned in the opening segment of this lecture. Because the end of Hebrews, Hebrews 11, gives us this great catalogue of the patriarchs and others that followed them. But, it ties all of that to us. It says, “And these all having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.” Do you see that? The account given to us of the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the twelve sons of Jacob, Joseph and the others—they are all relevant to us, right now as they have ever been.

But, we do not first and foremost preach Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. But rather, we preach the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. We show how God uses, and God blesses and prospers His people in and through the Lord Jesus Christ and the covenant that He has established with His people. Having considered some of the highlights in the unfolding of God’s promise, we will look in the next lecture at three other figures that are found during patriarchs that will have relevance for the remainder of our studies in the Old Testament.