Course Syllabus

Course title: ET 810 The Book of Genesis (OT Bible Elective)


Course instructor: Robert R. Gonzales Jr. is a graduate of the Reformed Baptist School of Theology, Grand Rapids, Michigan. He also holds a Master of Arts degree (M.A.) in Theology and a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Old Testament Interpretation from Bob Jones University. He is the author of Where Sin Abounds: the Spread of Sin and the Curse in Genesis with a Special Focus on the Patriarchal Narratives (Wipf & Stock, 2010) and a contributor to the Reformed Baptist Theological Review, The Founders Journal, and Westminster Theological Journal. Bob and his wife, Becky, have five children.

Course credit: 2 credit-hours

Course requirements: Student must satisfactorily complete the following course requirements:

(1) Lectures & Reading
The student must listen to all 4 sixty-minute lectures on “Primeval History” by Dr. Richard Pratt. The lectures are in audio and video format and may be accessed here: http://thirdmill.org/seminary/course.asp/vs/prh.

The student must read following assigned works in their entirety:

The Book of Genesis in one of the following versions:
- New American Standard Bible (NASB)
- New King James Version (NKJV)
- English Standard Version (ESV)
- Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)
- New International Version (NIV)
- New English Translation (NET)


(2) Book Review
The student shall write one book review of either Where Sin Abounds or How to Read Genesis. The review should be between 5 to 8 pages (double-spaced). Use a book font (e.g., Times Roman).

(2) Expositional Paper
The student should write one “expositional paper” on a passage or a topic from the book of Genesis. Below are a few passages and topics the student may want to consider:
Let the instructor know if you’d like to do your paper on a passage or topic not listed above. The paper should resemble a manuscript from which you might preach a sermon or give a lecture. It shouldn’t just be technical; it should also be practical. The instructor is looking for the following elements in the paper:

- Proper formatting, spelling, punctuation, and writing style.
- Good exegesis, interpretation, and exposition of the text
- Helpful illustrations and applications

The instructor has appended a sample “expositional paper” entitled “Isaac’s Carnal Appetite,” which is largely based on Genesis 27. The paper should be between 3,500 and 5,000 words. If the student has any further questions about the paper, he should contact the instructor.

The instructor has included some “recommended reading” below that may be helpful to consult in writing your paper.

**Course grading:** Lectures and reading = 20% / Book review = 30% / Expositional paper = 50%

**Recommended Reading:**


Disclaimer: by recommending the works above the instructor does not wish to imply that he agrees with every perspective or position advanced in these works. The student should read these books critically.
INTRODUCTION [Read Gen. 27]

This morning I want us to focus our attention on the sin of Isaac as highlighted in Genesis 27. One scholar has remarked, “A more powerful and a more fruitful chapter for the sacred ends of tragedy was never written than the tragic chapter of Isaac’s deathbed.”\(^1\) As I was trying to think of a helpful way to capture or summarize Isaac’s failure as it’s portrayed in this passage, my mind immediately went to that passage in Hebrews 12:1, which in the King James Version reads:

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.

The key phrase is “the sin which doth so easily beset us.” Isaac’s problem in Genesis 27 was not an isolated lapse in judgment. Rather, Isaac’s problem in our narrative was the result of a pattern of sinful behavior in a particular area that he failed to deal with properly and that eventually resulted in his making some very unspiritual decisions. His sin is what we commonly call a “besetting sin.” A besetting sin is a particular sin with which a believer habitually struggles and to which he may frequently succumb.

Before we move on and identify Isaac’s besetting sin, I need to make a confession. When you and I think of “besetting sins,” we commonly think of particular areas of weakness, such as “a bad temper,” “laziness,” “lust,” “overeating,” “gossip,” etc. It’s possible, however, that the particular “besetting sin” or “sin that easily entangles” the author of Hebrews had in view was more basic and fundamental. In fact, some commentators believe he was referring specifically to “unbelief” as the believer’s “besetting sin.” That may very well be the case. And since I don’t want to twist a text just to suit my purpose, I wanted to make you aware of the difference of opinion concerning the proper interpretation of Hebrews 12:1.

Nevertheless, having made that concession, I believe we may still use Hebrews 12:1 to characterize Isaac’s particular weakness and sin in Genesis 27. Though unbelief is at the root of all our sin, that unbelief will often manifest itself differently in different people. For example, as we survey the various characters in Hebrews 11 in light of the OT narratives where their life is portrayed, we can recall that their faith would often manifest itself in unique ways and their unbelief would often manifest itself in unique ways. Abraham struggled with honesty. Moses struggled with patience. Samson struggled with lust. Although all our varied sins may be traced to unbelief, it’s also true that unbelief will often manifest itself in each of us in slightly different ways.

I think the rest of the Bible supports this. Think, for example, of the different categories into which the Bible sometimes places different sinners. Some are called “sluggards.” Others are called, “liars.” Some are called “fornicators.” Still others are called, “gluttons.” Does that mean that these particular individuals only commit one kind of sin? Of course not! What it does mean is that the particular sin mentioned is, perhaps, the most prominent or at least one of the most prominent sins in their life.

And I think it’s safe to assume that even after we become believers, we may still struggle with those particular sins that at one time significantly characterized our life. If laziness was the predominant sin in our unconverted state, we may still struggle with the remnants of that sin. If we

\(^1\) Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990), 102-03.
were converted out of a background of immorality, we may still struggle with lust. If our former life was characterized by impulsiveness or a lack of self-control, then such may be our “besetting sin” as Christians. Though all our sins can be traced to unbelief, our remaining unbelief may manifest itself through the various weaknesses that characterize each of us. So I still think it’s biblically appropriate to speak of a believer’s “besetting sin.”

That leads us to our passage in Genesis and Isaac’s besetting sin. When I think of Isaac’s sin—as portrayed in this narrative—I’m reminded of the legendary Greek hero Achilles. In Greek mythology, Achilles was an almost invincible warrior before whom nearly all foes were defeated. According to one version of the epic, Achilles mother, who was a goddess, took him when he was an infant and dipped his entire body into a magical river in order to make him immortal and invincible. There was one part of his body, however, that she was not able to immerse into the river. She was, according to storyteller, holding the child by the heel. Thus, Achilles heel was his one weak spot, and according to the story, it was an arrow that pierced his heel, which brought his downfall.

You may be wondering, “What does Achilles’ heel have to do with Isaac?” Isaac, like Achilles, had a soft spot. Only for Isaac, it wasn’t his heel. It was his stomach. **Isaac had a soft spot for good food.** Moses provides us with a hint of this weakness earlier in the narrative. After the birth of Esau and Jacob is described, we read in Gen 25:27-28 -

**ESV Genesis 25:27** When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. 28 Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

So Isaac’s weakness was his love for good food. Therefore, we could entitle our message, **“Isaac’s Carnal Appetite.”** Or, if you prefer a more generic title, “The Believer’s Achilles’ Heel.”

Somebody says, “What wrong with enjoying good food?” In one sense, “Nothing.” It’s not sinful in-and-of-itself to enjoy a well-prepared cuisine of wild game. Many of us would have some repenting to do if that were so. It’s not wrong for us to enjoy food and to have favorite dishes. It is wrong, however, when our appetite for good food becomes inordinate or excessive. For you it may not be the love of good food. It may be an inordinate love for money. It may be an excessive concern for reputation. It may be a preoccupation with comfort and ease. All of us have some kind of Achilles’ heel. Some of us may have more than one.

For Isaac it was an inordinate love for food. And one of the reasons God placed this story in the Bible was to warn us against potential weak spots in our own lives so that we might be on our guard and that we might not fall into the same sin as our father Isaac.

With these thoughts before us, I’d like to develop our theme under two headings: (1) The signs of Isaac’s carnal appetite; (2) The cure for Isaac’s carnal appetite.

I. The Signs of Isaac’s Carnal Appetite

I’d like to highlight four ways in which Moses exposes Isaac’s carnal appetite or spiritual Achilles’ heel.

**1. A carnal appetite is often an uncontrolled or inordinate desire for something that may be otherwise legitimate.**

We’ve already seen the first hint of Isaac’s carnal appetite in chapter 25. Lest you think I read too much into the text, let’s move back to chapter 27 and note how Moses indicates that Isaac’s love for wild game continued to be a problem into his old age. The phrase “delicious food” appears 6 times in the passage (vv. 4, 7, 9, 14, 17, 31). Most telling is Isaac’s appended phrase in verse 4:
“Prepare for me delicious food, such as I love.” His wife, Rebekah, repeats this phrase in verse 9 where she commands Jacob:

ESV Genesis 27:9 Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, so that I may prepare from them delicious food for your father, such as he loves.

Then Moses himself highlights the phrase in verse 14:

ESV Genesis 27:14 So [Jacob] went and took them and brought them to his mother, and his mother prepared delicious food, such as his father loved.

Can you see the emphasis that the Holy Spirit is underscoring in our narrative? Isaac doesn’t merely eat delicious food. He emphatically loves delicious food. And that excessive love for food gives rise to other spiritual weaknesses and sins as we’re going to see.

Are there things in this life that you really love? They may be legitimate in-and-of-themselves. But they so dominate your life that others around you begin to think of you and refer to you as the man or woman or child who’s crazy about such-and-such. “She’s boy-crazy.” Or, “He’s in love with basketball.” Or, “She’s all wrapped up in music.” Or, “He’s a ‘workaholic.’” Or, “He’d spend all his time on a fishing boat if he could afford it.” Or, “She loves the shopping mall.”

Do you get what I’m saying? I may not have pushed your particular button, but it’s likely that you have a button. It’s likely that we all have buttons—things in this world that we sometimes like too much. So much that we become known as the guy or the girl who’s head over heels for such and such or who’s a fanatic about such and such. Unfortunately, the “such and such” is often not Christ or spiritual things but merely temporal things. And such an inordinate appetite frequently leads to other problems, which brings me to the second sign of a carnal appetite.

2. A carnal appetite prompts us to make choices contrary to sound judgment.

Isaac’s love for Esau’s cooked game not only inclined his heart to treat Esau as his favorite. Worse, it blinded Isaac to Esau’s own profane character. At least two times before the event in chapter 27, Moses highlights Esau’s ungodliness and unfitness for the blessing.

First, in 25:29-34, we read that Esau sells his birthright for a mere bowl of stew. We’re going to look at this text in more detail when we study Esau’s life later in our series. For now, let me just cite Alexander Whyte, who aptly assesses the spiritual significance of Esau’s action:

The covenant promises made to his fathers had no interest; they had no existence even to Esau. They can take the promises who care for them; as for Esau, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

Whyte then summarizes Esau’s character with the following poignant words: “All the time, an animal more than a man. All the time, all body and no soul. All the time, a profane person, who failed the grace of God.”

The second time Moses highlights Esau’s ungodly character is found in 26:34-35. There we read,

ESV Genesis 26:34 When Esau was forty years old, he took Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite to be his wife, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite, 35 and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.

Here, Esau makes three terrible mistakes that show he’s not fit to be the recipient of the Abrahamic blessing.

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2 Bible Characters of the Old and New Testaments, 100.
First, he takes two wives rather than one, thus imitating the bigamy of the wicked antediluvian Lamech and disregarding the creation norm of monogamous marriage. Second, Esau marries women from Canaan rather than taking a wife from his own clan, as did his father Isaac. Third, He apparently married against his parents’ wishes as the passage implies that Isaac and Rebekah were displeased with Esau’s choice.

In light of Esau’s obvious lack of a passion for the things of God and in light of his worldly mindset and lifestyle, one would think that Isaac would come to the irresistible conclusion that Esau was unfit for the blessing. If there was any original ambiguity in the meaning of the birth oracle that spoke of the “elder serving the younger,” that ambiguity should have evaporated in light of Esau’s profane character and immoral behavior.

But the Isaac of Genesis 27 is not merely physically blind. His carnal appetite has made him spiritually blind. He’s lost “sound judgment.” He’s not playing the part of a wise and discerning father. Instead, he’s making a momentous choice that has serious ramifications for the outworking of God’s promise all on the basis of his inordinate love for savory meat.

Application: Are we allowing an inordinate affection for some of the temporal things of this world unduly influence major decisions we make? Are we allowing our love for the “finer things of life” to cloud our spiritual judgment and dampen our zeal for God’s kingdom?

Brothers, I confess that I struggle with this. Indeed, it’s hard to live in such an affluent country as America and not struggle with this. The ads on TV or in the newspaper or on the Internet constantly bombard us with pictures of our favorite food or our favorite clothing or our favorite new electronic gadget, and before long we find ourselves spending much more time searching for a good deal on some piece of merchandise than we spend cultivating our walk with God.

When we first started out as Christians, we seemed to be so heavenly minded and zealous for the things of God. But just as Isaac began to lose his sight when he got older, so we begin to lose sight of what matters most to God. And this loss of spiritual vision and discernment is one of the marks or signs of a carnal appetite. But thirdly

3. A carnal appetite often leads to secretive behavior.

The conferral of a father’s blessing was, in the ANE and the Bible, supposed to be an event that involved the whole family (see Gen. 49). However, according to our text, Isaac doesn’t bother to gather all the whole family together in order to make his plans known. Instead, he plots with Esau secretly within the privacy of his tent.

Such stealthy proceedings suggest an uneasy conscience on Isaac’s part. He knows that what he’s doing is wrong, and so he attempts to hide it.

Application: Brothers and sisters, is this not what carnal appetite can do? First, it preoccupies our attention. Then it clouds our judgment. Then, when we know that we’re no longer walking in the paths of righteousness with a good conscience, we begin to cover our tracks.

Young person, you may literally “love” Facebook, just as Isaac “loved” delicious food. You find yourself spending more and more time per week checking and posting and chatting. You even find yourself neglecting weightier matters, like homework, chores, and even your devotional life. In fact, if you had to choose between Facebook and the Bible, you’d probably choose Facebook. And because your parents have warned you about the addicting power of Facebook, you find it necessary to be secretive. When mom enters the room, you quickly close the browser and pretend
like you were doing your homework. Or you wait until everyone’s sleeping and then you login and do your stuff when nobody knows.

You say, “Come on, Pastor, you’re making a mountain out of a molehill. You’re treating Facebook as if it were a cardinal sin!” Well, a quarter is a small and insignificant thing. But if we hold it close to our eye, it can block out the light of the sun. In the same way, something as small and seemingly insignificant as Facebook can slowly dominate our attention, cloud our spiritual discernment, and prompt us to engage in secretive behavior.

Of course, this is not just a danger for young people. Adults can be guilty of this. A husband or wife can try to hide from his or her spouse where they’re spending money. What they’re spending on may not be evil per se, but they know they’re not being a good steward. So they’re secretive.

Brother or sister, are you doing things in secret that you’d be ashamed if other family members knew? If so, it’s a good sign that you’re not walking in the path of spiritual wisdom because there’s some thing that has too much of your attention and affection. Fourthly and finally,

4. A carnal appetite will ultimately place you in opposition to God’s plan.

It was God’s will that Isaac confer the blessing on Jacob, not on Esau. Now there may have been some initial ambiguity in the prophecy as it reads in the original Hebrew. In English, it reads, “The older shall serve the younger.” Later allusions to the text in Malachi and Romans interpret the prophecy as God preferring Jacob over Esau. Nevertheless, when it was first given, the Hebrew could have read either way: “The older shall serve the younger” or “the older the younger shall serve.” Like much prophecy in the Bible, it may only become clearer as future events unfold.

But by the time Isaac was ready to confer the blessing, plenty of events had unfolded to make it clear that Esau should not be the recipient of the blessing. Yet, Isaac had made up his mind (on the basis of his belly) that Esau would receive the blessing. And so, in the first half of Genesis 27, we encounter an Isaac who is standing in opposition to God’s plan of redemption. It was God’s plan that Jacob be the heir of the blessing. Rebekah saw this. Her scheme for overruling her husband’s mistake was wrong, but her intuition was right. She knew that her husband was blind in more than one way. She knew that he was poised to hinder God’s promise.

Application: Brothers and sisters, whenever we give ourselves over to a carnal appetite; whenever we get our eyes off Christ and set our highest affections on temporal or earthly things; whenever we lose sound judgment and, as a result, find ourselves behaving in ways that we feel necessary to hide from the spiritually minded; when these things are happening, we’re not advancing God’s kingdom but we’re in opposition to it. We’re undermining the gospel of Christ.

Now God will overrule and what we intend for evil, he’ll use for good. Ultimately, he will build his church, and our sin won’t stop him! But God’s success will come at the expense of our shame! As a believer and follower of Jesus Christ, do you really want to stand against him? Do you really want to be known in this life as someone whose life and testimony undermined the gospel instead of adorning it? Do you want to be on Christ’s team scoring goals for his victory? Or do you want to be like the guy on my college soccer team who as a defensive back often kicked the ball in the wrong direction and scored more goals for the opposing team than he did for ours?

That brings me, briefly, to the cure for a carnal appetite. What was ...

II. The Cure for Isaac’s Carnal Appetite

Two things, and I’ll have to be brief.
1. A divine exposure of sin

God use the scheme of Rebekah and the deceit of Jacob to overrule Isaac’s folly. That certainly doesn’t excuse Rebekah’s and Jacob’s sins. It does show, however, that God will get his way even if he has to use the sins of some in order to overrule the sins of another. Isaac thought he could pull the wool over the eyes of Rebekah and Jacob and even God? As it turns out, the wool tied to Jacob’s forearms deceived Isaac into thinking he was conferring the blessing on Esau when in fact he conferred it on Jacob.

How does Isaac respond? I believe we find ...


Once Isaac comes to the realization that he’s been tricked and that’s he’s blessed Jacob instead of Esau, we’re told that he "trembled very violently" (27:33). Literally, Isaac "trembled with a very great trembling." As one commentator observes, “Hebrew can hardly express Isaac’s panic more graphically.”

But instead of revoking his blessing on Jacob and transferring it to Esau, Isaac decides to let things stand. In fact, despite Esau’s self-pity and whimpering, Isaac resolutely affirms in verse 37:

Behold, I have made [Jacob] lord over you, and all his brothers I have given to [Jacob] for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained [Jacob].

Isaac trembles with shock, submits to God’s overruling providence, and confers the blessing on Jacob. Isaac is a man who’s come to the realization that God has exposed his own folly, who’s repented of his sin, and who’s realigned himself with God’s plan.

CONCLUSION

If you have a carnal appetite for the things of this world that’s clouding your spiritual vision and that’s harming your witness for the gospel, be sure God will eventually expose your sin. He won’t do it because he delights in your shame. He’ll do it because He loves you, and because He’s committed to insure that nothing—not even your backslidden condition—gets in the way of his plan.

The real question will be, “How will you respond when God uncovers your folly?” Perhaps he’s taken a gentler route and uncovered your folly in this sermon. He’s spoken to your heart and convicted you about an inordinate love for the things of this world—perhaps even one thing in particular, food, clothing, money, Facebook, sports, friends, career, etc. My exhortation to you is to repent of your sin and by faith realign your life with God’s plan. In the words of Jesus, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33).

Don’t we also see God’s sovereign grace overruling the evil of men—even of his own people—for his glory and for our good? I’m reminded of a verse that appears at the end of Genesis and which epitomizes God’s grace working behind the scenes:

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20 ESV)

God is so committed to ensure that his plan is accomplished and his promises fulfilled that he overrules Isaac’s sin and ensures that Jacob gets the blessing. Similarly, God will overrule the sinfulness of the Jews and Gentile who put Jesus—the promised “offspring”—to death in order to accomplish his plan and bring salvation to the world. Praise his Name!