

**Text:** Genesis 28:1-22

**Title:** Jacob Moves Away in Obedience to His Parents

**Truth:** God remains faithful to His promises despite us.

**Date/Location:** Sunday April 23, 2023 at FBC

## Introduction

After the debacle over the birthright and blessing, Esau wanted to kill Jacob, but Rebekah and Isaac sent Jacob away to Padan Aram and the city of Haran to get away from Esau and find a wife. This begins a 20-year portion of Jacob's life (31:41).

### I. Isaac's Improved Outlook, 28:1

- A. Let's go back one second. Isaac had in his mind that he was going to bless his eldest son Esau. We might chalk that up to forgetfulness on his part. After all, it had been 77 years since the twins were born and God had given the somewhat strange message about one being stronger than the other, and the older serving the younger (25:23). We would like to think that his mistake was an honest mistake of memory, though certainly that would be a bad on him. But maybe that is because we do not think the whole situation is that important. That would be a bad on us.
- B. Remember that Esau despised and sold his birthright and decided to chase after pagan women and multiple such wives. Also, remember the parents had a problem with partiality (25:28), with Isaac favoring Esau, and Rebekah favoring Jacob. There was more than mere forgetfulness going on here. May I also ask: what excuse can you conjure up if God tells you something very clearly, and you forget it?
- C. The deceit by Jacob exposed Isaac's backwards way of thinking about God's plan. God cleverly arranged to permit this bit of sin by Jacob to accomplish a larger purpose, namely, to remind Isaac that the Abrahamic promise was to go through his *second* son. God does that sort of thing—but remember that God never requires you to sin to do His will. After a short bit of time passed, he got his head screwed on straight, and was able to call Jacob (compare 27:1

with 28:1, out of the order they should have been), give him instructions, and offer a less “forced” blessing.

## II. Isaac’s Instructions to Jacob, 28:2-5

- A. Go far away. The purpose of this little “vacation” was to save Jacob’s life because Esau was about to commit murder out of anger against his brother. It would be premeditated 1<sup>st</sup> degree murder because he was planning it in advance, but whatever it was would not have a happy outcome for Jacob.
- B. Take a wife. Isaac instructed his son to find a wife from their extended clan, namely from his cousins on his mom’s side through Uncle Laban. Rebekah could not take it if her second son became unequally yoked with one or more pagan wives, so Isaac directed his son to find a better wife.
- C. Be blessed by God. In verses 3-4, Isaac passes down to Jacob the explicit blessing of Abraham, his grandfather. Read these slowly and digest them. These are not just empty words. These are powerful. Think about them from Isaac’s perspective. Then, from Jacob’s perspective. “My dad is praying for me that...”
  - 1. May God Almighty bless you.
  - 2. May God make you fruitful and multiply you.
  - 3. May God give you the blessing of Abraham and yours after you.
  - 4. May God cause you to inherit the land which is part of that promise and your large posterity be able to fill it. Jacob was presently a “stranger” in the land. He was not settled there, did not own it outright, and probably like his dad was always dodging the other inhabitants and their claims on water rights, etc.
- D. Verse 5 records the summary of what happened. As far as mom and dad were concerned, Jacob had done what he was asked to do and left the clan. They would not see him again for 20 years. But Jacob had obeyed (verse 7), his life was protected, and he would soon find a wife.

### **III. Esau Seeks Restoration, 28:6-9**

- A. We cannot be sure exactly how long it took Esau to recognize that his wives were a problem in his parents' sight. Remember he married around age 40 (26:34). But now, Esau "saw" some things now that perhaps he had not clearly observed before.
1. He saw what Isaac did to prepare the way for Jacob to find a wife.
  2. Esau also observed how Jacob obeyed their dad, and this obviously was positive and favorable to their parents.
  3. He also saw that his mom and dad (Isaac and Rebekah), did not care for the pagan women of the surrounding region (Canaan). Their distaste was far more than a matter of preference. It was a matter of like-mindedness, of religion, of idolatry, of worldview.
- B. This "seeing" changed his thoughts about how to please his parents. I do not believe he was "reforming" his behavior to become more godly; rather he changed behavior to become more pleasing on a human level to his parents. But pleasing people is not the right motivation for an action. And it is not clear that his real goal was to be truly obedient to his parents—rather just to "get by." His goal should have been to please God. Since it was not, he added another sin to his collection by marrying a third wife. God designed marriage for one man and one woman, not to be polygamous. It is also plausible that the fact she comes from the rejected line of Ishmael is another strike against Esau. She could have been a believer in the true God, but perhaps not.
- C. What Esau schemed to do to gain favor reduced his standing in the eyes of God, and probably also his parents. Three wrongs do not make a right! Lesson: have the right motivations!

### **IV. Jacob's Journey to Haran, 28:10-22**

- A. As God met with Abraham (12:7, 17:1, 18:1), and with Isaac (26:2, 26:24), so also God made Himself known to Jacob. The circumstances were memorable for him, and for us.

B. Put yourself in Jacob's place: single, lonely (though perhaps with one or more servants), traveling far away from home, thinking it is possible you will not be back for a long while, leaving behind everything you have known up to now. And traveling with a conscience that knew he had done something terribly wrong to his dad. Could you use some encouragement at this point?

To the point of the duration of Jacob's journey, his mom Rebekah thought it would be "a few days" and she would "send and bring you from there." But she never did. She died in the meanwhile. It's a family tragedy set up by the deception of the mom and her son against the father. They did not follow the Ephesians 5-6 pattern for the family.

C. You can be forgiven for thinking that the primary purpose of the stone was to be his pillow, since he did put it at his head. Perhaps he propped up on it, but stones do not make good pillows. The end of the chapter tells what the stone became (see verse 22).

D. During his sleep that evening, Jacob dreams of a very tall ladder or staircase that reached from earth to heaven. The angels were using the ladder to move up and down between heaven and earth. This is a vision that indicates the connection of God with events on earth. God is not the deist's god, completely disconnected from the events of men and nations. Nor is He the god of the pantheist, integrally a part of the material world and not outside of it. He is *transcendent*, but He is also *immanent*, meaning *here*, doing His work in the world. God delegates much of His work to the angels who carry out His commands. The dream picture seems fantastic. But the truth it teaches is real, and very encouraging—and a good reminder that God knows about everything that goes on in this world. God is leading, and alongside, and underneath YOU too, even—and especially—in hard times.

E. At the top of the ladder stood the Lord who identified himself as the God of his forefathers. He was watching over Jacob in his lonely travels away from home. He did not forget the man upon whom His eye had been focused. God promised the Abrahamic covenant now to Jacob, the grandson of Abraham. The promises mentioned are these:

1. The land will be inherited by Jacob and descendants.
  2. Jacob will have many descendants.
  3. The blessing of God will rest on all the families of the earth through Jacob and his descendants.
  4. God promises His presence with Jacob wherever he travels and that He will not leave Him until all this promise is fulfilled.
  5. God will bring Jacob back to this land.
- F. Jacob was awestruck—and stricken with fear. He felt the presence of God in the place. It was where God “came down” to mankind, so he called it Bethel and considered it the gateway or portal to heaven. Bethel means “the house of God.” It had been called Luz before. Where is *your* Bethel?
- G. Of all visions of God and angels in the Bible, this one perhaps best shows the connection between heaven and earth, the “closeness” of God to His creation. The heavenly ladder shows up again in John 1:51 with “the Son of Man” Jesus. He pictures *Himself* as the staircase, the connection between God and men. As in Jacob’s time, the angels in John 1:51 serve God and Christ, and will help authenticate Jesus as God’s holy servant.
- H. This place became a very important place in the religion of the Jewish people, because of this remarkable event. At this place:
1. Jacob set up a stone pillar to mark the place where he had slept.
  2. He poured out an offering on it, a *libation*.
  3. Furthermore, Jacob made a vow that he would take the LORD as his God if what God had promised indeed happened. He correctly understood the promise that God would be with Him, keep Him, provide food and clothing, and bring him back to the land of promise.
  4. He promised that he would give God a tithe of all he owned. In this, he followed the pattern of Abraham in Genesis 14:20. Of some interest: this portion in 28:22 is the only other place in Genesis where a tithe is mentioned. While we do not have a law in force today from God that requires a tithe, what is interesting

here is that this reflects Jesus's teaching that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Jacob showed deep respect for God; He loved God; He was grateful to God. That showed in that He was willing to *give* to God of his *money*, which represents his *time*, which represents his *life* and *self*. Are *you* regularly giving to God's work as part of your worship of God? If not, where is your heart?

- I. The wording may seem to say that God is not *presently* his God, but that He *will* be (20 years) in the future. But it seems more realistic to think that Jacob already considered God to be His God and that he fully expected God to fulfill His promises, so that "if" God will be with me is not an uncertain thing in his mind. Perhaps the "he will be my God" idea is that Jacob is saying he will *continue* to follow God, or that he would personally take up the mantle after the prior generation (Isaac) passed away. Jacob must have a level of certainty in his mind—as should we—that God is faithful to keep His promises, and powerful enough to do so as well. Even if Jacob is a bit wobbly in his commitment now, as we have been from time to time, we can be thankful that God did not cast him off.

Consider 31:42 and 31:53, where Jacob refers to the God of his father, the God of Abraham, and the Fear of Isaac.

## Conclusion

Jacob deceived to "get the blessing." But you cannot get a real blessing that way. You might get the words of a blessing, but not the blessing itself. Despite his chicanery, God still was with him. And here is the thing: God Himself gave Jacob the blessing of Abraham and Isaac. He did not need to scheme to get the blessing. God was going to see to it anyway.

You trust God, and He will take care of you in the best way possible. He will never leave you. You might leave Him for a time, but would you come back to Him, declare Him to be your God, which He is anyway, and follow Him with yourself and your substance? Do not go anywhere, much less far away, until you are assured that God will be with you, until you can say that He is and will be your God.