



**Sunday School Lesson Summary for October 14, 2007
Released on Wednesday, October 10, 2007**

"Jacob's Dream"

**Lesson: Genesis 28:10–22.
Read: Genesis 27:41–28:22.
Devotional Reading: Psalm 105:1–11.**

**Times: 1928 B.C.
Place: Beth-el**

LESSON TEXT: Genesis 28:10–22.

10And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran.

11And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep.

12And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.

13And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;

14And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

15And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

16And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not.

17And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

18And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it.

19And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first.

20And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on,

21So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God:

22And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Recount the contents of Jacob's dream and his reaction to it.
2. Compare and contrast Jacob's dream with "normal" dreams.
3. Explain how he or she will be sensitive to God's leading, balancing clear direction from Scripture with analysis of external circumstances.

INTRODUCTION

What an awesome truth it is to know that no matter where we go, God is always with us! How about the thought that He is always faithfully at work in the lives of His people? For these two reasons alone, we should never cease to serve Him and give Him all the praise and honor and glory that are due to Him. We should be eternally thankful for His very wonderful care.

You might question why God would choose to *be with* Jacob and continue to *take care of* him after he tricked his older brother Esau out of his birthright, and again out of his father's blessing. I thought about this myself, and it caused me to go back to Genesis 25:21–28 where I was reminded of the following events.

God told Rebekah, "Two nations are in your womb. Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger." *Wow!*

Verses 24 through 28 further describe that when Jacob was born after Esau, "[Jacob's] hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob." The name Jacob means "supplanter," or more accurately translated: *one who uses deceit and/or trickery to take over from another*. The book of Genesis allows us to see that on more than one occasion Jacob acted out the literal meaning of his name. (See 25:29–34; 27:1–29; and 30:25–43; 31:1.)

The bottom line: God is sovereign; which means that He is able to do what He wants, when He wants, how He wants, and with whomever He chooses. It was divinely allowed for Jacob to do the things that he did; his actions held a special purpose. God can take what appears to us to be our *mess-ups* and change them into wonderful blessings for His people. God continues to be able to take faulty little old *us* and transform us into the vessels *and recipients* of His blessings.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Isaac and Rebekah had been living prosperously in Beer-sheba since Isaac made peace with the Philistines (Genesis 26). Like her mother-in-law Sarah, Rebekah was unable to conceive. So God intervened to keep the promise alive. Unlike her mother-in-law, however, Rebekah gave birth to twin sons. This complicated matters since only one son could be the child of promise.

God foretold that Jacob was to be that child, but Jacob did not wait patiently for God to fulfill this prophecy. Instead, he lived up to (or down to!) his name, which can mean "heel-grabber": he manipulated his brother into surrendering his birthright, and he deceived his father in order to get the blessing that was intended for Esau.

Esau, of course, was furious about his brother's deception—so much so that he plotted to kill him as Cain did Abel. Aware of these plans, Rebekah arranged for Jacob to escape his brother's fury and marry a woman from Abraham's kin. It was important that the child of promise maintain a pure bloodline by not marrying a Canaanite. So Jacob went to Haran, the hometown of Rebekah's brother Laban.

QUESTIONS

JACOB'S LADDER (Gen. 28:10–12)

1. Why did Jacob have to leave his family in Beersheba?

Because of the deception, "Esau hated Jacob" and "said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob" (Gen. 27:41). When Rebekah learned of Esau's plans to kill her favorite son, she told Jacob, "Arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran; and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away... and he forget that which thou has done to him" (vss. 43–45). Those "few days" would turn out to be 20 years before Jacob returned to the land of Canaan. At this point, however, he had to flee Beersheba to save his life from the wrath of this brother.

2. Why was Haran selected as the place to which Jacob would journey?

Although Isaac was old, he was not unaware of the conflict between his sons. Calling for Jacob, he commanded him to go to Haran and find a wife (Gen. 28:1–2). This was where Rebekah had come from many years earlier. Jacob departed in such a manner that Esau was unaware of it. Had he known that Jacob was leaving, he might have attempted to murder him before he left Beersheba for Padan-aram.

Rebekah cried to Isaac about her feelings of Jacob possibly marrying women who did not worship God; like his brother Esau had done. Genesis 27:46 says, "And Rebekah said to Isaac, 'I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth, like these [my daughters-in-law] who are the daughters of the land [Hittite women], what good will my life be to me?'" Rebekah did not want another foreigner for a daughter-in-law. Jacob being her favorite son, she certainly did not want him to marry a foreign woman.

3. Where was this "certain place" that Jacob decided to "lay down... to sleep" (v. 11)?

Jacob at this point is about 60 miles into his journey. He has run out of sunlight and thus stops for the *night*. We learn in verse 19 that this *certain place* is called *Luz*, a region located 20 miles northwest of the Dead Sea.

What is most notable about this place is that it is *not* noteworthy. Other travelers in Jacob's day may intentionally set up camp near a temple or other holy place in hopes of gaining the favor of their god(s). Jacob, on the other hand, stops at no place in particular. This underscores the fact that Jacob does not attempt to engineer or manipulate the divine blessing he is about to receive, as was the case with the blessing he received in dealing with Esau. The revelation he is about to receive is entirely due to God's gracious initiative.

Christians need to hear this message today. We have not been instructed to orchestrate a divine word from God. It is not a matter of praying the right prayer, meditating the right way, or assuming the right bodily posture. God is not like a vending machine that yields goods automatically when we push the right buttons.

Instead, God speaks to whom He will, when He will, and how He will. In Scripture God sometimes reveals himself to those who have petitioned Him with fervent prayer and fasting, but often He does so when humans least expect it.

4. What kind of dream did Jacob have after leaving his family? What was the significance of this dream (v. 12)?

As Jacob dreamed, he saw a stairway resting on the earth, and its top reached to heaven. Through the ages there have been many interpretations concerning the significance of the stairway Jacob saw. In the context of the recent events of Jacob's life, though, it seems to represent the fact that he was not forsaken by God. To be sure, Jacob's bargaining and conniving had led only to hostility and his need to flee certain death. It would seem that this vision was to assure Jacob that God's plan would not be derailed by his self-centered actions.

Matthew Henry saw the stairway as representing "the providence of God, by which there is a constant correspondence kept up between heaven and earth.... Providence does its work gradually, and by steps....The wisdom of God is at the upper end of the ladder, directing all the motions. This vision gave very seasonable comfort to Jacob, letting him know that he had both a good guide and a good guard, in his going out and coming in" (Matthew Henry's Commentary, Zondervan).

5. What role do dreams play as a means of God's direction today?

While dreams may simply be related to one's daily activities, either good or bad, issues of great significance came through dreams in Scripture. Dreams were one of the most common ways God's will was revealed to individuals in the Bible (Gen. 20:3; 31:10–13; 37:5; 40:5; 41:15). So it was with Jacob and his future.

Great caution should be exercised when a person today claims to have received divine revelation in a dream. Since we have the written Word of God, we should thoroughly explore its teachings before we attempt any interpretation of dreams. Dreams generally reflect out fleshly struggles and desires and have nothing to do with God's will. (We will revisit this subject in our November 11, 2007 lesson "A Dream Unfolded.")

JACOB'S FUTURE (Gen. 28:13–17)

6. What promises were given to Jacob during the dream?

Like Abraham (Gen. 13:15) and Isaac before him, Jacob was promised that the very land on which he was lying would be given to his posterity or his descendants

(28:13). His descendents would be as numberless as the particles of dust on the earth (vs. 14) and would spread in all directions.

"Jacob, like Abraham, received a confirmation of the promised blessing while asleep in the night. Abraham received God's word 'in a vision' (15:1), and Jacob saw the Lord in a dream. Both times a divine confirmation was given regarding the establishment of the same covenant of promise. In a remarkably similar fashion, both chapters turn to the future 'exile' of Abraham's descendants and the promise of a 'return.'" Abraham's vision looked forward to the sojourn of God's people in Egypt and also to the Lord's deliverance in the Exodus. Jacob's dream looked forward to his own sojourn in Haran and to the Lord's eventual return of Jacob to the land promised to Abraham. In both cases the promise was that God would not forsake them and would return them to their land" (Barker and Kohlenberger, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan).

As with Abraham, Jacob was promised, "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 28:14). This was ultimately fulfilled in Christ. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to the seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).

7. What part will you and your church have in helping fulfill God's intent to bless the world?

God blesses the world through His Son, but also through His people. It is God's people who fulfill the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19, 20. God sends out His church as a body, and Christians individually, to accomplish that work.

Instead of looking at the world and seeing it in all its corruption—and thereby seeking to avoid involvement in the world—we are to recognize our role of making a holy difference as we are wholly different. The corruption of the world is lessened as the church takes seriously its mission to go into the world and be a blessing to the world. This requires courage, faith, and conviction to implement on a Christian-by-Christian basis.

8. What was Jacob's immediate emotion once he awakened (vs. 16,17)?

Once Jacob awoke, he realized that he had been in the presence of God. It had been unlike anything he had experienced before. "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not," he said.

Once the sense of excitement began to wear off, he was afraid and declared how awe-inspiring the place was. It is obvious that Jacob, unlike many today, had a healthy fear of the Lord. Indeed, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10). Realizing that he had been in God's presence in the unique manner brought Jacob a sense of awe and reverence. Jacob's conclusion was that this was the "house of God,... the gate of heaven" (Gen. 28:17).

JACOB'S VOW (Gen. 28:18–22)

9. What was the significance of the stone Jacob set up?

At first light, Jacob took steps to dedicate this place to the Lord. What had been his *pillow* for the night had now become a commemorative *pillar*. To dedicate it for holy purposes, Jacob poured oil on it. Elsewhere in Scripture, anointing oil is symbolic of God's presence. Under the old covenant, prophets, priests, and kings were inducted into office with a ceremony involving anointing with oil. Of course, the Greek term "Christ" and the Hebrew "Messiah" both literally mean "anointed one."

"Moreover, standing stones also become important from this point on. These are different from altars. Memorials were set up to recall divine visitations so that other might learn about God" (Walvoord and Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Cook).

10. Why did Jacob name this place "Beth-el" (v. 19)?

Because of the significant events that occurred in this location, Jacob called the place "Beth-el," which means "house of God." Although there was no actual house of worship there, it was the house of God because Jacob had found the Lord there. When Stephen made his defense (Acts 7), his major point was that God had spoken in many settings, not just in formal places of worship like the temple.

As a geographical note, Genesis 28:19 mentions that the original name for Beth-el was "Luz," an ancient Canaanite city. Since Joshua 16:2 has the phrase "from Beth-el to Luz," some think they were two neighboring cities. Some scholars think the above phrase should be translated "from Bethel-Luz," thus indicating one city with two names.

11. Do you have your own sacred place—your own, private Bethel—where you meet God on a regular basis? What is it like? If you don't have one, what can you do to set one up? Or should you let God take the initiative in this regard?

We teach that God is not confined to a place. Christians may talk about the fact that they can worship God anywhere at anytime. Both of these observations are true. But it is not wrong to have that special place to meet God.

For some, the place where they go to meet God may be a kind of "prayer closet," either within a church building or at home. Others prefer an outdoor setting for their special place, perhaps a quiet spot on the porch, beside a lake, or in the woods.

12. What vow did Jacob make (v. 20)?

Making vows to the Lord is serious. "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools" (Eccles. 5:4). A vow is a promise, and Jacob promised to serve God from that day forward. Jacob was a rather self-serving person, but he was now committing his life to God. This did not mean that he had immediate spiritual maturity, any more than a new Christian becomes spiritually strong in an instant. It was, however, a beginning point for Jacob.

13. Why did Jacob promise to give a tenth of his resources to the Lord?

We note that Jacob did not ask much from the Lord, only "bread to eat, and raiment [clothes] to put on" (Gen. 28:20), as well as a safe return to his father's house. That being so, Jacob promised to give a tithe back to the Lord. The practice of giving one-tenth of one's earnings back to God is seen throughout the Bible and is not a "New Testament only" concept (Gen. 14:20; Lev. 27:30; Mal. 3:8–10; and Luke 11:42). –John Alva Owston

CONCLUSION

Responding to God's Promises

Jacob was born into an important family that was chosen by God to do great things. Jacob knew from an early age that the day would come when he would be called to continue his family's legacy. Yet Jacob was far from perfect. At his best he listened,

waited, and obeyed. At his worst he tried to force events along paths of his own choosing via human ingenuity and deceit.

Yet God was able to work through Jacob's worst moments. God showed His love for Jacob at Bethel by extending to him a promise that he did nothing to deserve. Jacob could have responded in all sorts of negative ways. Instead, Jacob recognized that the call was from God and responded with that fact in view.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, God's invitation to join the people of promise—the church—has been extended to all. It matters not whether we are male or female, slave or free, Jew or Gentile. It matters not whether we grew up in a solid Christian home, in a "Christmas-and-Easter-only" religious environment, or in the belly of paganism. It matters not whether we were a respectful youth, raucous teen, or greedy business person. God's invitation confronts us where we are, regardless of where we have been.

Our past cannot stand in for us, whether good deeds, ideal parents, or worldly achievements. God lays claim to our present life and calls us to an eternity with Him. Despite Jacob's imperfections, he responded to that call and took the necessary first step forward. God was certainly not finished working on him, but Jacob welcomed Him in to begin that work. So must we.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

"He is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations."
(Deuteronomy 7:9): Respond to God today.

PRAYER

"O God of Bethel, by Whose hand / Thy people still are fed, / Who through this weary pilgrimage / Hast all our fathers led.

"Our vows, our prayers, we now present / Before Thy throne of grace; / God of our fathers, be the God / Of their succeeding race.

"Through each perplexing path of life / Our wandering footsteps guide; / Give us each day our daily bread / And raiment fit provide.

"O spread Thy covering wings around / Till all our wanderings cease, / And at our Father's loved abode / Our souls arrive in peace" (Philip Doddridge, 1737).

In Jesus' name, amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

In our lesson next week (October 21, 2007), we will read about how God blessed His people through the heartwarming love story of Jacob and his wife Rachel. Read Genesis 29:1—35 in preparation for the lesson simply entitled, "Jacob and Rachel." The Golden Text is Genesis 29:20, "Jacob served seven years for Rachel: and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her." *Good studying!*

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

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