

Genesis 28

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Date: 20 October 2019

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[0 : 00] Let us turn back then to the chapter that we read. Chapter 28 of Genesis. The book of Genesis. And we can read again verse 16.

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, Surely the Lord is in this place. And I did not know it. And he was afraid and said, How awesome is this place.

This is none other than the house of God and this is the game of heaven. Surely the Lord is in this place. And I did not know it.

The chapter that we have here and the part that we read of the chapter before sets the scene for us of the end of the first stage of Jacob's life.

Again, I am not going to go through the whole story, the whole history of Jacob himself. But you can see, of course, that Esau hated Jacob.

[1 : 10] And there are two reasons why he did so. One, of course, was because Jacob had stolen his birthright. Or to be more correct, Esau had bartered his birthright when he had come back from the field and he had given it to Jacob.

Or you remember the potage that Jacob had made. But secondly, particularly, and perhaps more important in a sense, you remember that Jacob had stolen the blessing.

And this was due particularly, of course, you can see that back in chapter 27, you can see that this was due particularly to the influence of his mother, of Rebecca.

And you remember how, I'm sure you remember how Rebecca and Jacob had complied together to deceive Isaac. Now, Isaac was easily deceived.

And the reason for that was quite simply that he was blind. We're told later, and you can work it out, that Isaac, for the last 57 years of his life, was blind.

[2 : 28] And therefore, when Jacob comes in, dressed in the skin of the goat that he had killed and so on, and his mother has already prepared the meal, then they managed to confuse Isaac quite easily.

And you can see that, that even although Isaac suspects it in verse 22 of chapter 27, he says, the voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.

But even so, he still gives the blessing, the blessing of the firstborn. And you can see that blessing laid out from verse 28, the middle of verse 27, down to verse 7.

So that when Esau returns from the hunt with the meat, the blessing that he, in tears, demands from his father, from verse 39 onwards, is a blessing that is way inferior to the blessing wherewith Jacob has been blessed.

Verse 40, By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother. Now, this was a fulfilment, of course, of what God had told Rebecca when she was in childbirth.

[3 : 52] You remember that we were told earlier there that the two boys, the twins that they were, were struggling together to come out. And she inquired of the Lord, this is in chapter 25, Why am I like this?

And the Lord said to her, 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.

Now, the older is, of course, Esau, who is born minutes before Jacob. But do you remember that Jacob, when the birth happens, that Jacob had hold of Esau's heel.

And the very name, Jacob, means Sophanter, Deceiver. And that is what Jacob's life has been all about up until now.

And we see in chapter 28, then, that for two reasons, he is being sent away. Not just because of Esau, although that seems to be the main reason that his mother gives, but also that he might find a wife.

[5 : 09] Now, it's quite interesting when we speculate, or we actually work out here, it's not a speculation, that Jacob, at this point, is 77 years old.

And for 77 years, he has been, if you want to think of it this way, a mommy's boy all his life.

He has been with his mother in the tents. He appears to have also been involved in looking after the sheep, but he is certainly more contented round about the tent with his mother and looking after the sheep than he is in any of the sort of other things that, for example, Esau is involved in.

And it seems, from the beginning of the passages here, that Jacob is very much a mommy's boy rather than a daddy's boy. Now, there's not anything necessarily wrong with that.

I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with being a mommy's boy or a daddy's boy. And sometimes, through different stages of our childhood, we switch very often from one to the other.

[6 : 25] And if your families are anything like mine, and I presume they're very similar, kids figure out very quickly how to shift allegiance when it suits them best.

So that when they want something, their mommy's boy, and when something is denied by mommy, they go to daddy. And if you're not very careful, they can play one off against the other very quickly to get what they want.

But there doesn't seem to be any of that with Jacob at all. He seems to be quite content following the direction that his mother actually gives him.

And it's interesting, at the beginning of the chapter here, when Isaac blesses Jacob and charged him and says to him, you shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan.

Why is he saying that? Is he saying it simply because of what Rebecca said in the verse before, I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth, that is, the Hittite people, the Canaanites round about.

[7 : 31] If Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these who are the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me? But Isaac has another reason.

And that is, of course, that the daughters of Heth, the daughters of Canaan, the people round about, were idolatrous people. They had no knowledge of and did not worship the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac.

And therefore, Isaac wishes that Jacob's covenant blessing will remain with him by taking a wife who will worship the God of Israel.

Now, this is, of course, in the future, still to come. You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. And it seems that Esau's wife were real troublemakers.

Now, whether that was simply because of their idolatry or whether the two of them were making Rebecca's life a misery is simply a matter of conjecture.

[8 : 38] And one might well say, well, you know, if you have two wives, what do you expect? But that's a topic that we're not going to go into. But you notice that later on that Esau, in order to try and please his father, instead of taking another wife from the daughters of Canaan, he goes, and we see in verse 9, he goes to his relatives, to Ishmael, and took another wife from there, in addition to the wives that he had.

And you might well think that Esau's a glutton for punishment there, but on the other hand, you can look at it, of course, again, in the context of the times, that this was culturally quite normal.

in fact, among many of the tribes of the time, the number of wives that you had was a symbol of how wealthy you were.

Because from your wives, not only would you gain the dowry, that is, usually cattle, perhaps some land as well, but of course, your family, in terms of children, would also be multiplied.

You notice that this is Esau's thinking. Esau's thinking is a materialistic thinking. He is thinking on the good of the things for himself.

[10 : 03] And all the way through, we see that Esau seems to have no interest whatsoever in the God of his mind. He is constantly looking out for himself.

And although he weeps because he hasn't received a blessing, it is again the material side of the blessing that he is upset about more than anything else.

Now imagine if you can, if you put yourself in the place of Jacob here. Never mind, never been away from his mother and his father before.

And here he is at the age of 77 years, being sent on a long journey for 400 miles by himself and all that he has that we're told later in chapter 32, all that he has is his staff.

Nothing else. There is no one with him. As far as we can see, he has taken no possessions whatsoever with him apart from the clothes that he is wearing and the staff.

[11 : 26] But remember again, as we sang in Psalm 23, thy rod and thy staff are with me wherever I go. But Jacob was not conscious of that at this particular time.

How would you have felt if you were walking away like this, as we see Jacob in verse 10, Jacob went out on Beersheba and went towards Aaron.

And he came to a certain place and stayed there all night because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head and he lay down in that place to sleep.

He doesn't even seem to have a bed mat, something that he could roll up and use as a pillow. And one would surmise again that he would not be used to sleeping with his head on a stone.

I don't know how many of you have ever tried sleeping with a stone as a pillow. I can assure you it is not very comfortable. It is not conducive to sleep at all.

[12 : 38] But Jacob doesn't seem to have any major problem with that. And here we see the character of Jacob in the sense that he simply adapts to whatever circumstance he is in.

But nevertheless he is in a very lonely place. He has, as it gets dark, he has no idea that there is a city very close to him.

And that city, in verse 19, the city of Luz, is mentioned in various other places, and surely if he had known that, he would almost certainly have gone there to find lodging for the night.

Some say maybe that he was afraid to go there in case he would be assaulted. But it would seem more likely that he had no idea that the city was actually there.

And so he sets off to sleep. And then he has perhaps one of the best-known dreams in scripture.

[13 : 42] Who has not heard of Jacob's ladder? Ladder. Even nowadays, of course, if you talk to people about what they know of the Bible and ask them questions about, oh, which Bible stories do you know?

Those who know any at all, Jacob's ladder will come out in the first four or five. Almost certainly like Daniel and the lions and so on. And yet, the word that we have translated as ladder from the Hebrew is a very bad translation.

you and I think of a ladder. We tend to think of something that you put against a wall and there's rungs in it on which you climb up. But that is not the better translation at all.

The better translation is a stairway. A stairway was set up on earth and its top reached to heaven. And there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

now, there are many remarkable things about this dream. This is actually going to be the third time that Jacob, sorry, the first of three times that Jacob will have visions or encounters with angels.

[15 : 03] A little bit later on, we're going to see him meeting the angels of God at Manaheim when he's on his way back, 20 years later. And there's no mention made of what happens there.

Nothing other than that he met the angels of God. And in the same chapter at the end, at Pina you remember that he whistles with an angel.

Some think the angel of the kingdom, the Lord Jesus Christ, but that again we're not going to go into here. But this is his first vision of the angels of God ascending and descending on it.

Now, if I say the words, stairway to heaven, for some of you it might ring a bell. Perhaps those who are around my old age are a little bit younger, you may remember a very famous song called stairway to heaven by a very famous group called Led Zeppelin.

Or maybe that's how it signed your comfort zone. But it's interesting that if you examine the lyrics of that particular song, and there's great debate about what some parts of it mean, the song ends with this.

[16 : 26] it says, if you listen very hard, the truth will come to you at last. If you listen very hard, the truth will come to you at last.

Now, Jacob here has plenty to listen to, because apart from the fact that there are angels ascending and descending, behold, the Lord stood about.

And we'll come to that in a second. Notice, first of all, that the angels are not descending and ascending, but ascending and descending.

What's the difference? Where else do we see anything with angels that would help us to clarify? Do you remember the first chapter of the book of John, when Satan appears among all the angels of God at the throne of God?

What happens there as well? We see that the angels are being sent out from heaven in order to complete missions here on earth.

[17 : 47] We touched on this a little this morning, but I'll go over it again. And when they've completed their missions, they then ascend. And we see in the order that the words are given, that the angels of God are completing missions, going back up to heaven, being given new orders, and then coming back down again.

Now, who are these angels? They are, I hesitate to use the term the ordinary angels, because there's nothing ordinary about an angel, from one sense.

But if we look into the angels, we find that there are three or four different categories of angels. We saw this morning, we saw the archangel Michael in the book of Daniel, and we saw, of course, various other things as well.

We see the cherubim at the Garden of Eden, we see the cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant and the Mephisti, and there are various other things that we see, but the ordinary angels, and inverted commas, if I can use that term, every time they appear in Scripture, they appear as ordinary human beings.

Very often, there is no way to know that you are in fact dealing with an angel. Look at those who come to Lot in the city of Sodom.

[19 : 21] Lot has no idea that they are angels until they smote the city with blindness. He has no idea. They just seem like ordinary human beings.

As far as we can see, there is no suggestion anywhere in Scripture that the angels ever appear in female form, but only in male form. Why that is, I would hesitate to give a reason for that, but that's the way it appears.

Look at the angel dealing with Manoah and his wife before the birth of Samson. They have no idea that it's an angel until he goes up on the flame of the sacrifice.

God's. And so, what does Hebrews tell us? We touched this line. Hebrews 1 tells us that angels are ministering spirits, that they are sent out to minister to God's people.

And we saw in the book of Daniel the warfare, the spiritual warfare that may be going on in heaven that you and I are unaware of, completely unaware of sometimes.

[20 : 37] But yet, it is taking place. And the writer to the Hebrews tells us again, I think I mentioned that this morning as well, be not forgetful to entertain strangers, because you may entertain angels unaware.

There are many stories of encounters with angels. My father had a vision before he went off to the Second World War, where an angel told him so clearly that he would be taken prisoner and be a prisoner for the five-year duration of the war, and that in Poland and in Germany.

That's detailed in my book. We ourselves had an encounter with what I believe to this day was an angel in the middle of the Atacama desert in Chile, where we, after our car had broken down in various mysterious circumstances, the guy who heard this, I am quite convinced, was an angel.

But that's another story, and I'm not going to go into that just now. But this is what Jacob sees. In his loneliness, by himself, not knowing whether his mission to find a wife will actually succeed, not knowing whether his relatives will accept him, in this dark and lonely place, he's given a vision of him.

And isn't that often the case, that when you and I, when God's people are struggling, when we are in great difficulty, and it may not be a material difficulty, it may simply be a spiritual difficulty, struggling to feel the Lord's presence, struggling sometimes even to bring ourselves to read his word, struggling in prayer, when we feel really down, isn't it very often in that dark place that the Lord himself comes to us and lifts us back up again?

[22 : 53] That's an experience, that there's further you carry on in the wilderness, the more often you will come across it. And this is Jacob's experience here, what happens?

The Lord stood above it and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. Now notice Abraham wasn't his father, his father was Isaac.

But nevertheless his birthright is reckoned in Abraham. And you see here God's electing choice.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. Esau is rejected. Later on the scripture says that Jacob I have loved and Esau I have hated.

And you see what happened of course with Isaac. Ishmael rejected. that the child of the born woman should not be equal with the three.

[23 : 53] That God is electing a people from the very beginning. And this is the promise that now comes. The land on which you lie when I give to you and your descendants.

Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth. You shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And in you and your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

How is that possible? How can all the families of the earth be blessed? Because we're talking about here about the patriarchs, the founders, founding fathers of the Jewish people.

But remember who descended from Jacob. You remember that Jacob has twelve sons, whereas four wives, and it is from Judah that our Lord Jesus Christ is descended.

If you follow the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1 or elsewhere, what do you see? That it is through Jacob, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, that Jesus is descended.

[25 : 14] the right to the Hebrews dwells on that quite a lot. It's not through the priestly time of Levi. It's not even through the first born of you, but through Judah.

Judah, who later on in a few chapters we will find committing terrible sins, with Tamar, but nevertheless Tamar is in the genealogy again.

Follow through the genealogy, what do you find? You find Ruth the Moabites, a Gentile, not a Jew, a Gentile. Come to Jericho, what do you find?

Rahab the heart. People that you would never expect to find in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the promise is here. in your seed, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. It would be a long time before Jacob would see that blessing.

[26 : 20] But if you see him reunited with Joseph in Egypt later on, and see the blessing that he gives to Joseph's sons, torrents his death, you see that he saw that the scepter would come from Judah and would rule over his people.

You see, God has amazing ways of fulfilling his promise. Jacob at this time, the majority of commentators think here that Jacob was not converted, that he was not really a worshipper of God at this time.

But this experience opens his eyes. And you see, behold, I am worshipper, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land.

For I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to. It would be another twenty years before Jacob would return to this land.

During those twenty years, he would not only find a wife. And you remember, of course, the story of Rachel later on in the next chapter, and then how Rachel and Leah and so on, and the various others, and how Jacob becomes very rich through looking after the fourteen years that he is with Labou, and he spends his time profitably there.

[27 : 53] And the covenant will be reaffirmed with him again at exactly the same place. Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.

Sometimes, like Jacob, your first reaction to your experience with God is fear. He was afraid and said, how awesome is this place.

This place is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of hell. And that is why he calls it Bethel. Beth, El.

Beth meaning house, El, God. The house of God. But his first reaction is fear. And that's very often the first reaction of the individual when God starts to strive with you.

When God makes himself known to you. And the spirit is beginning to strive with you. It produces fear.

[29 : 04] But strangely enough, that fear is not always the fear of God, but the fear of what will other people think. Dear me, if I go out to the prayer meeting, what are people going to say?

If I do this, if I do that, people are going to point the finger and laugh and mock and say, what does he think he's doing at the prayer meeting? and so on. And our first strivings very often with the spirit of God produce a fear in us.

And sometimes it produces another fear. And sometimes it's a fear that stays with many of the people of God, very often and even into old age, in their experience, mature experience, is the fear that their experience with God is not genuine.

That they have not properly come to a saving knowledge of their own Jesus Christ. And very often that's an irrational fear which is promoted by their own sin.

Or promoted by their own awareness of their sin. You see, the more experienced you and I are as Christians, walking in faith, the more aware we come, day by day, that we fall short in thought, word, and deed.

[30 : 38] As you go on in the Christian life, you learn to control your deeds. You learn even perhaps to control your words, but sometimes when you're angry, your words escape you in a way that is very un-Christian.

but how many of us remember and manage to control our thoughts? Because Satan has a habit of just bringing a thought into your mind, just like that, to divert you from the things of God.

And very often the thought that he brings into your mind is that you are not worthy of the love of God. You are not worthy of his covenant measures.

And this is what has been reaffirmed to Jacob here. The covenant that has been made with Abraham, you can go back several chapters and see how that covenant was made.

In the Old Testament way, the way of the time, which an animal was divided into two parts, and the two people in the covenant could walk up and down in the middle of the divided animal, before it was then set on fire as a sacrifice.

[31 : 59] That's how a covenant was cut. The Hebrew is literally to cut a covenant. You remember God doing exactly that with the smoking lamb, with Abraham, when he formed the covenant with him.

This covenant is now renewed with Jacob. It's renewed, it's directed to him, and God speaks to him directly, as far as we can see, for the first time in his life.

This seems, as far as we know, to be Jacob's first experience of God speaking to him directly. Surely the Lord is in this place.

I do not know it. God speaks to you. And there's that very often in some place where you did not expect God to speak to you.

You did not expect a blessing. It's sometimes where the greatest blessings occur to us. That can be in various places.

[33 : 10] It can be in fellowship with others, in conversation with our believers. worship. It can be in your own private devotions or in public worship.

And how many of us have lost a blessing by not attending the means of grace at times? You never know if you don't go what blessing you've blessed.

I can certainly say that there have been times where the last thing that I wanted to do was go to a prayer meeting or go to a house group meeting or something that particular evening.

And yet, very often I found that when I made the effort to go, that was where I got the most blessing from. And that is what Jacob sees here.

He awoke from his sleep. And this is that what you and I did when the Lord came to meet us and we gained our knowledge. We awoke from our sleep.

[34 : 11] the sleep of death that everyone is in unless they are brought to life by the Spirit of God. This is Jacob's awakening.

Surely the Lord is in this place. I do not know. Perhaps you and I expect that we will only meet with God in certain places.

But you see that God can meet with us anywhere. there is no building here. It is not necessary. There is no church. There is no fellowship. There is no session.

There is no nothing. There is just Jacob in a desert place. And yet the Lord meets with us. And God can meet with you and I.

Sometimes where we least and when we least expect it. And very often these are the most blessed times that we can remember of our fellowship with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

[35 : 16] And it is here the triune God that is addressing Jacob. I am the Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This is the Elohim, the plural form of God that is used here. Surely the Lord is in this place. I did not find.

And you see what his reaction is. This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven. Now there are many interpretations of course given to the dream of the stairway or the dream of the ladder and Jacob's reaction to this place.

The Jews believed very often that in fact the stairway represented the various stages of the Jews until the coming of Messiah. They pictured the stairway as coming four stages which included the destruction of the temple and Babylon and various other things etc.

Again I'm not going to go into that in detail. But they also have a tradition that the stone that Jacob took, as we see in verse 18, he rose early in the morning and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it.

[36 : 34] And this is an act of sanctifying. Very often people question and say where did he get the oil from? Was he carrying the oil with him? It wouldn't have been unusual if he was.

Olive oil was something of course that was not only common in those particular circumstances and places but also something on which they depended enormously for cooking, for anointing, etc.

But what does he do here? He may have gone into the city of Luz to get it. He sanctifies the stone. That's what pouring oil on it means.

It is a process of sanctification. And the Jews maintain that he actually slept on four stones, not one, but he arranged four stones as the pillow and that when he poured the oil on them they magically fused into one and set this pillar standing up as a memorial.

There's nothing in scripture that warms that particular interpretation but be aware of it again. And then he calls it Bethel, the house of God.

[37 : 46] He doesn't know that in twenty years he will come back here again and God will meet with him again at this place. and because of that the Jews insist that this is Mount Moriah and they insist that this, the Jewish rabbis insist that this is where the temple was built.

But that interpretation is quite warm because we can see even on the ancient maps the city of Luz is well south of where Mount Moriah was.

Mount Moriah was part of the hill of which Jerusalem was built. And if you want the exact location of Mount Moriah nowadays all you have to do is look at the Dome of the Rock.

I'm sure you know what the Dome of the Rock is. If you don't Google it and you'll find that the mosque on the Dome of the Rock is built on the top of what was Mount Moriah.

With all the connections that that involves. But finally, time is passing here. Finally, just the vow that Jacob makes very briefly.

[38 : 55] Jacob made a vow saying, if God be with me. Again, this is a bad translation because that seems to suggest that Jacob is negotiating with God.

That he's putting a condition on God. If God be with me and keep me in this way that I am going and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God.

And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house and of all that you give me I will surely give a tenth to you. Now that would seem that Jacob is setting conditions.

But God has already indicated to him what the covenant conditions actually are. And it should really lead, then Jacob may allow to say, not if, but because.

Because God will be with me. And keep me in this way that I am going and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on. You notice that what he asks for?

[40 : 02] It's the minimum necessary to have. Bread and clothing. There's no materialism about Jacob at this point. Quite the opposite.

So that I come back to my father's house in peace. Then the Lord shall be my God. Not if, but because.

And Jacob comes to a knowledge of the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac as it is revealed to them here. And you notice the result of that.

of all that you give me, I will surely give a tenth to you. It's not the first time that we have seen tithing, giving a tenth.

We saw Abraham doing it with Melchizedek earlier in the story. It's the second time it's repeated. And it is, of course, something that we encourage, we attempt to encourage and to perform as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, that you and I also give a tenth of all that we have to the Lord's service.

[41 : 20] That may be very difficult for us to understand, but when you consider that everything you have is given to you by God, giving a tenth back is all that God requires, all that God requires, the principle of tithing.

And it would be very easy to go on and on about that and the difficulties that the church faces because of its financial situation. And if its members and its adherents do not tithe, it's difficult to see how the church can keep going.

And of course, that is the business model that so many people try and implement nowadays in church politics. But we should remember that God is so.

God is in command. He will provide. And sometimes he provides in amazing ways for his people, for his church, and for the spreading of his word.

And it's laden. It's quite amazing vision. It's quite an amazing vision in us. And some people think that, you know, I can't be converted unless I've had some kind of amazing experience like this.

[42 : 45] Of all the saints and scripture that you read on, how many of them had Damascus road experiences? Very, very few.

there are some who come to faith like this in traumatic circumstances. But not all. In fact, the majority do not.

The majority come to faith in a slow process of realizing God's sovereignty, God's love, and their need for salvation.

And that's what we should see in the story of Jacob's letter. Let us pray. read that power.