

GENESIS

In the beginning God...

Jacob and Esau

Jacob was successfully blessed by his father Isaac and now Esau probably considered himself as the innocent victim of foul play and certainly through our eyes he was. However, Isaac knew that Jacob was the one to receive the blessing. Even though Rebekah may have had all the best intentions when she created her plan and perhaps she may have thought this plan might help God it was still deceit and would, as a result, develop some problem as all things born from corruption most often do.

Chapter 27

- V41** *Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.”* (ESV)
- V42** *But the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son and said to him, “Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you by planning to kill you.”* (ESV)
- V43** *Now therefore, my son, obey my voice. Arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran* (ESV)
- V44** *and stay with him a while, until your brother’s fury turns away—* (ESV)
- V45** *until your brother’s anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?”* (ESV)

Esau had quickly changed from a carefree hunter into a bitter and vindictive person. The idea of Jacob exercising dominion over him was more than he could bear. He resolved to murder his brother as soon as his father died probably thinking that his father was going to die soon (See Genesis 27:2).

Rebekah heard about the threat on Jacob’s life so she called him and instructed him to stay with her brother for a while (most translations use "for a few days"). Knowing Esau's nature, she assumed his anger would quickly pass away and return to his carefree ways. Unfortunately the few days turned out to be over 20 years! As far as the record goes, she never saw Jacob again after that day. Her plan did prove to be very costly to her.

- V46** *Then Rebekah said to Isaac, “I loathe my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?”* (ESV)

Chapter 28

- V1** *Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him, “You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women. (ESV)*
- V2** *Arise, go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father, and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother. (ESV)*
- V3** *God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. (ESV)*
- V4** *May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham!” (ESV)*
- V5** *Thus Isaac sent Jacob away. And he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban, the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob’s and Esau’s mother. (ESV)*

Apparently Rebekah's counsel quickly convinced Isaac, undoubtedly still shaken from the recent events, and no longer willing to thwart God's plans, he called Jacob. Isaac gave him strict instruction not to marry a Canaanite woman, almost in the same words that Abraham had used long ago concerning his own marriage (See Genesis 24:3). Rather, he was to go back to Rebekah's family in Paddan-aram, and there take a wife from among his own cousins, the daughters of his mother's brother. Then Isaac repeated the blessing in terms much more like those which he himself had received from God (See Genesis 26:3-5).

- V6** *Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he directed him, “You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women,” (ESV)*
- V7** *and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan-aram. (ESV)*
- V8** *So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac his father, (ESV)*
- V9** *Esau went to Ishmael and took as his wife, besides the wives he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebaioth. (ESV)*

Esau until this point perhaps thought that he still had his father's support, but now knowing that he again blessed Jacob, this time intentionally, he must have thought he needed to do something to regain his father's respect. The fact that Isaac had sent Jacob far away to find a wife from Rebekah's people emphasized to Esau that his father, as well as his mother, was highly displeased with Esau's choice of wives.

Esau had previously married two Hittite, undoubtedly pagan worshipping (probably the reason Rebekah had problems with them being around), women (See Genesis 26:34) in an attempt to partially repair this situation, Esau went to his Uncle Ishmael's home (Ishmael himself was already dead) and secured one of his daughters, Mahalath, as another wife. Either Esau was not well informed or perhaps in the past was not really interested in the matters of God, this attempt of Esau to gain his parent's respect is somewhat pathetic. As far as the national promises were concerned God had already cast out Ishmael and his descendants. It may be true that Ishmael's family had been taught many of the personal and moral standards of the true faith of God, so that Mahalath would perhaps get along better with Isaac and Rebekah than Judith and Bashemath, Esau's other wives.

As Jacob started out on the long road northward, all he had to go on were the promises implicit in God's blessing. He was alone and traveling light, moving quickly to escape the potential wrath of his brother. He had no caravan to sustain him, not even a tent under which he could rest. Plus there were no armed servants to protect him against beasts or bandits and he wasn't experienced like his brother in living off the land. Rebekah no doubt had packed food and other supplies as he could carry on his back, but otherwise he was alone in a strange and dangerous country. Except for God, that is!

V10 *Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran.* (ESV)

V11 *And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep.* (ESV)

It was 500 miles to Haran and, even though he no doubt had either a camel or donkey to ride on, it would require several weeks to reach his destination. The region around the town of Haran was called Paddan-aram meaning the "field of Aram," The name Aram was derived from the son of Shem (See Genesis 10:22) with a people speaking Aramaic in the northwestern section of Mesopotamia having come essentially to mean the land of Syria.

V12 *And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!* (ESV)

V13 *And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring." (ESV)*

V14 *Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.* (ESV)

V15 *Behold, I am with you 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 promised you."* (ESV)

Jacob had one of the most remarkable dreams any man ever experienced. The location was known as Luz but would soon be named Bethel "House of God" by Jacob (See verse 19). Bethel is about 70 miles north of Beersheba, and it seems likely that it took Jacob at least two, possibly three days to get this far. It was near Bethel that Abraham had built an altar (See Genesis 12:8 and 13:3) and Jacob would later return (See Genesis 35:1).

Jacob had known and believed God's promises practically all his life. No doubt he worshiped the Lord and prayed frequently to Him. According to Scriptures God never before actually appeared and spoken to him as He had to Abraham and Isaac. It was on this occasion, as Jacob slept on the stones of Bethel, that God once again came down in a theophany, the first of eight, which Jacob would experience during his lifetime.

This theophany was in the form of a dream. The author of Hebrews tells us "*Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways.*" (Hebrews 1:1, HCSB). The dominant feature of Jacob's dream was a mighty ladder, extending from the earth up into the sky and beyond into heaven to God's presence. It is obvious that this was no ordinary ladder. The Hebrew "sulam" is used only this one time in the Bible. Whatever its exact form may have been, it clearly pictured to Jacob the interrelationships of earth and heaven. It showed there was intense interest in heaven concerning what took place on earth, with multitudes of mighty ministers of God coming down to earth to carry out God's commands.

Of course this was only a dream, but it was a dream symbolizing a wonderful reality. Though earth is surely separated by a vast, seemingly impassable gap from the heaven of God's presence, signifying man's separation from God's holiness, a bridge has been built to span the gulf. That magnificent Ladder could only be built by God Himself; interestingly it is God Himself (Read John 1:51).

Jacob saw God standing above the ladder and heard Him speak words of blessing, repeating all the promises He had made to Abraham and Isaac concerning his offspring and the land. Regarding his own immediate situation, God promised Jacob that He would be with him wherever he would go, protecting him, and then one day bringing him back to the land he was leaving. It should be noted again that God did not offer a single word of rebuke to Jacob, but only of blessing and promise.

V16 *Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it."* (ESV)

V17 *And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."* (ESV)

V18 *So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it.* (ESV)

V19 *He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first.* (ESV)

V20 *Then Jacob made 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 clothing to wear,* (ESV)

V21 *so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God,* (ESV)

V22 *and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you.”* (ESV)

After God had finished speaking to Jacob he awoke in awe. He had actually met God in this place. Perhaps he realized that Abraham also had long ago worshiped God here, but Abraham never seen such a remarkable revelation as this. The great God of creation, the God of heaven and earth, ruling an infinite multitude of mighty angels, was also interested in him! The God was YHWH, the God of Abraham and Isaac, and this very place was where God, in his vision, had installed the great ladder symbolizing His redemptive promise. Thinking this place should be called the House of God; he named it Bethel, though it had formerly been called Luz. And so it was called Bethel after that.

Jacob had been well instructed in the essential importance of the sacrificial altar, and the necessity of the substitutionary death of an animal to cover the sins of a believing and repentant sinner. Since the altar (like the ladder in the dream) represented the means by which man could approach God, it was appropriate that a visible altar commemorate the now invisible dream.

Although Jacob had no possessions at the time, Jacob believed that God would indeed supply them, and he voluntarily promised to restore one-tenth of everything he received back to God. So far as any record goes, there was no written law at this time concerning the giving of tithes to God. Abraham had given tithes to Melchizedek, and Jacob probably had this example in mind.

Later, tithing would become an obligation of the Mosaic Law (See Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:21 and 24), and it actually was a political law among many other ancient kingdoms as a form of taxation. But so far as both Abraham and Jacob were concerned, it was purely voluntary, as an expression of their thanksgiving to God.

Even though tithing is not required for salvation Paul reminds us that giving is to be an expression of love and concern for the Lord and His service *“You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. “For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.”*” (2 Corinthians 9:7, NLT)