



Lesson 2

Jacob Meets God (Genesis 27:41-28:22)

Every action we take, for good or for bad, has a reaction. The reaction to Jacob's deceit is enmity with his brother Esau. It doesn't matter that Jacob's sin led to a fulfillment of the will of God, there is still a reaction.

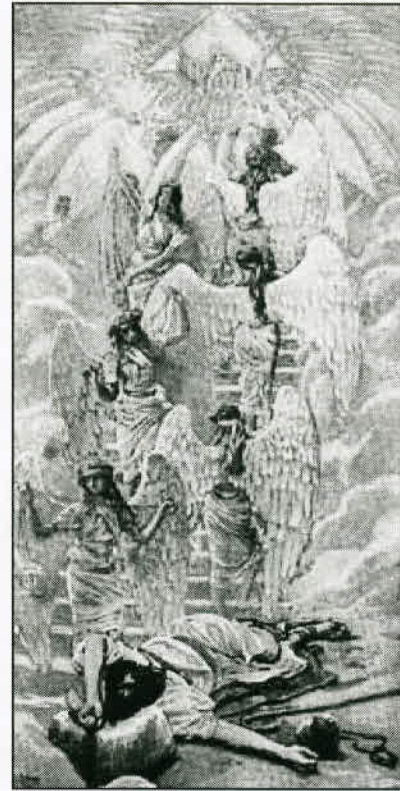
Esau's Grudge (27:41)

"Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.'" (27:41)

Fortunately for Jacob, Isaac lives another 44 years or so. But Esau's sin of murder in his heart is yet another occasion to move Jacob into the center of God's will for him, to find him wives in Haran who will bear the 12 sons, whose descendants will constitute the 12 tribes of Israel. Strange, how God can work out his will through sin, in spite of sin! This is a mystery to us.

Yet, here it is. Esau bears a grudge and because of this grudge begins to speak about his intentions to others.

Note: first he says it to himself (27:41), but soon he is saying it to others (27:42). Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.



Rebekah's Plan (27:42-45)

⁴² When Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, 'Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you. ⁴³ Now then, my son, do what I say: Flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran. ⁴⁴ Stay with him for a while until your brother's fury subsides. ⁴⁵ When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I'll send word for you to come back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?'" (27:42-45)

Rebekah overhears what Esau is plotting against her favorite son, and summons Jacob.

"Flee at once," is her command. Is running from our enemies ever an answer?

Sometimes. On a number of occasions when Jesus' enemies sought to arrest him or stone him, he just slipped away in the crowd (Luke 4:30; John 8:59; 10:39). Jesus had a mission to complete, and showdowns with his enemies did not suit this mission. Too

often, our ego is so involved that we refuse to avoid conflicts which would distract us from our primary task. Jacob's primary task -- from God's perspective -- is to become a man of God and to raise a big family. He can do that better in Haran than he could with the Canaanite women in Palestine at the time. So Esau's threat becomes the impetus for change.

a believing family, polygamy is no longer practiced.

Jacob Is Sent Away to Find a Wife (27:46-28:2)

Rebekah is the master manipulator. She knows how to get her way -- with Isaac, with Esau, and with Jacob. She says to Isaac:

"I'm disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living." (27:46)

Isaac, too, has suffered from having Esau's wives around (26:35). He takes action:

"So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him and commanded him: 'Do not marry a Canaanite woman. Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother.'" (28:1-2)

Now, Jacob can flee Esau with an excuse and with his father's blessing. Esau, too, hears of his father's wishes regarding a non-Hittite wife for Jacob, so Esau finds a descendent of Abraham -- Mahalath, Ishmael's daughter -- and marries her as a third wife, in order to try to please his father (28:6-9).

The Blessing of Abraham (28:3-4)

In spite of Jacob openly deceiving his father, Isaac still loves him and blesses him generously as he departs. Perhaps Isaac is finally beginning to see that Jacob is indeed the son through whom God's promise to Abraham will be fulfilled. And so he speaks over Jacob the ancient blessing of Abraham:

"³ May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. ⁴ May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham." (28:3-4)

Look carefully at the blessing, for it is a central theme of both the Old Testament and the New. This is the same blessing that God gave Abraham more than a century before Jacob's departure for Haran. In the chart below you can see the various forms of this blessing. There are at least three elements woven again and again through these blessings:

1. Fruitfulness -- numerous descendants,
2. Land -- the land of Canaan, and
3. World -- the nations of the world will be blessed.

This series of blessings introduces concepts that anchor themselves in Genesis and carry on throughout the Bible: covenant -- blessings and cursings, oaths and promises. We'll examine these more fully in Lesson 7.

The blessing of Abraham is mentioned in the New Testament also:

"[Christ] redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit." (Galatians 3:14)

"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:29)

Paul's argument is that Jesus is the Seed of Abraham, and if we belong to Jesus, then we, too, are descendants and heirs of Abraham. So what of Abraham's promise is left for us to inherit?

1. **Land.** Christ will reign on earth from Jerusalem, we are told.
2. **Descendants.** For us, probably spiritual descendants are most prominent.
3. **World.** Abraham's spiritual descendants are the salt of the earth who bring the message of Abraham's Seed -- the Messiah -- to the world. We are to be a blessing to the world. Through us, Christ's blessings are to flow out to others.



Jacob Begins His Journey (28:10-11)

"Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way, and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, who was the mother of Jacob and Esau." (28:5)

"Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set.... He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz." (28:10-11, 19)

Jacob leaves Isaac's tent in Beersheba, a desert town in the extreme south of Palestine, and heads north to his uncle's home, hundreds of miles away around the Fertile Crescent. He stops, perhaps the second or third night, at a town called Luz (28:19).



Jacob's Dream (28:11-12)

¹¹ When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. ¹² He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it." (28:11-12)

As he sleeps, he sees a vision of "Jacob's Ladder," angels ascending and descending a ladder or stairway¹ to heaven itself, with the base of it resting near him -- the "gateway" of heaven.

God's Blessing in the Dream (28:13-15)

Then, in the dream, God himself appears to Jacob and speaks.

^{13b} I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac.

I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying.

¹⁴ Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south.

All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.

¹⁵ I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

(28:13-15)

First, **God identifies himself**: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac" (28:13b).

Second, he renews the promise of **inheritance of the land** of Canaan:

"I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying." (28:13c)

Third, he promises a multitude of **descendants**:

"Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south." (28:14a)

Fourth, he promises that Jacob and his offspring will be a **source of blessing** to the entire world:

"All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring." (28:14b)

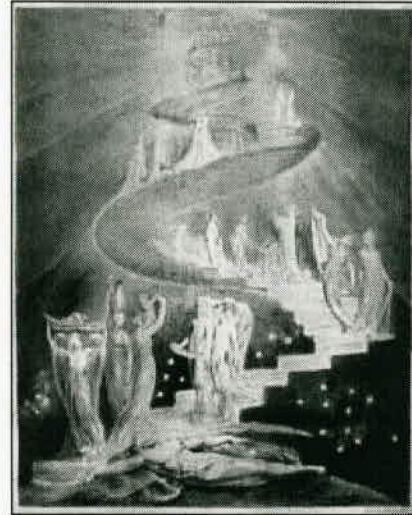
As we've seen, these promises form the core of the promises made to Abraham, renewed to Isaac, and then passed on to Jacob.

But he goes on to make **personal promises to Jacob**:

"I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." (28:15)

This doesn't mean that God will eventually leave him; it means that God will be with him to fulfill the promise.

Jacob has received blessings from Isaac by deceit (27:27-29) and then by Isaac's own will (28:1-4). But now he receives a blessing directly from God which confirms to him, the third generation, God's promises to Abraham. Jacob will never be the same.



"Jacob's Ladder" (1800),

Surely, the Lord Is in this Place (28:16-17)

Up until this time, we see little spiritual life in Jacob, but when he awakes from his dream, he is profoundly moved. Something in his life has fundamentally changed. His father's and grandfather's God has just now become his own. Whereas, once he took what he wanted for himself, now God becomes the One he lives for. This is Jacob's conversion.

¹⁶ When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the LORD is in this place,¹ and I was not aware of it.'" (28:16)

How many times in our lives we could say the same thing. We are intent upon our own plans and we are surprised by God. He makes himself known. We had no idea he was there.

Jacob probably doesn't understand God's omnipresence, that God is everywhere. He lives in a society of local, tribal gods. He probably believes that God is in sacred places, such as where his father or grandfather have set up altars. And he has just begun to grasp the

greatness and awesomeness of the Creator God who made the heavens and earth. But for now, his faith has just taken a big leap to see the Lord of Glory in this humble place.

"He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.'" (28:17)

He is frightened (*yārē*).¹⁸ The word "awesome" (NIV, NRSV), "dreadful" (KJV) is also the verb *yārē*, "to fear," but this time, in the Niphal stem. In this form the word is "frequently used to describe things as 'terrible,' 'awesome,' or 'terrifying.'"¹⁹

The phrase "house of God" in Hebrew is "Beth-el," the name which he gives the city in verse 19. Beth-el is from *bayit*, "house" + *el*, "God" ("El" is a shortened form of "Elohim.")

But Jacob sees more than just a "house" or dwelling in his sudden new vision of God. This place, with angels ascending and descending, is the "gate of heaven," the entrance to the majestic City of God. Jacob has had a mind-expanding glimpse of God's infinite greatness.

Jacob Sets Up a Stone to God

The dream suddenly awakens Jacob. I doubt that he sleeps much more that night. At first light, he takes action.

¹⁸ Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. ¹⁹ He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz." (28:18-19)

He takes the stone at his head and sets it up as a pillar (*maṣṣēbâ*), a stone standing upright, a commemorative stele, from *nāṣab*, "to stand upright."

Hundreds of years later, after the tabernacle had been built and the people settled in Canaan, such pillars were not allowed (Deuteronomy 16:21). They were too easily confused with the heathen Baal worship which occurred on the high places, in contrast to the true worship of God.

But in Jacob's time, the setting up of such a commemorative stele or pillar seemed an entirely appropriate way to honor and remember God's revelation of himself in this place.²⁰ Prior to this time, his father Isaac had led the family in worship of God. But for the first time Jacob sets upright a stone of faith and remembrance before the Lord. It is his way of placing himself, his life, before the Lord. His father's God has become his own God now.



Jacob sets up a stone to the Lord, unknown illustrator.

Anointing the Stone (28:18b)

After Jacob sets up the stone, he pours on top of it some of the precious oil he had taken with him for his journey. The practice of anointing seemed to be involved with cleansing and consecrating to God. Centuries later, kings, priests, and prophets were anointed for their offices. Objects in the tabernacle were anointed with specially-formulated anointing

oil: altars, the tent of meeting, the ark, the laver and its stand, and all objects relating to the altar. When Samuel anoints David as king over Israel, the scripture records, "from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power" (1 Samuel 16:13). The words "Messiah" (Hebrew *māshîah*) and Christ (Greek *christos*) both mean "Anointed One." Peter describes "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power...." (Acts 10:38).

So Jacob sets up the stone as an act of dedication of himself in worship, a way of remembering God's presence in this place. He anoints it as an act of cleansing and consecration, setting it -- and himself -- apart for God.

Jacob's Holy Vow to God (28:20-22)

But Jacob's act of commitment to Yahweh is not over yet. It includes a vow.

"²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear ²¹ so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God ²² and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.'" (28:20-22)

Here are the provisions of the vow. Notice the giant "if" clauses:

- If God will be with me...
- If God will watch over (protect) me...
- If God will give me food and clothing...
- If God brings me safely again to my father's house ...

If God will do what he has promised, then Jacob solemnly vows:

- Then he will be my God...
- Then this pillar will be God's house...
- Then I will give God a tenth of all God gives me

This may look like bargaining with God, but such was the format of a formal vow in Jacob's time. Each party would solemnly and formally make a vow to uphold the covenant. God has made promises to him in the dream; now Jacob formally responds. Yahweh has been his father's God, but now he vows that God (and God alone) will be his own God. What was family tradition now becomes personal.

"Vow" is *nēder*, "the act of verbally consecrating to (devoting to the service of) God, that is, vowing to perform.... To bind one's self with what proceeds from one's mouth."¹¹

The Promise to Return to Canaan (28:15b, 21a)

Notice one consistent element of both God's promise and Jacob's vow: return.—

"I will **bring you back** to this land." (28:15b)

"... so that I **return** safely to my father's house...." (28:21a)

God's purpose for Jacob is focused in Canaan, the land that God had promised to Abraham and his descendants forever. However, the present journey is not just a sidebar to Jacob's life. Sometimes we feel like God may put us on a shelf, or that we're off on a siding, rather than on the main track. We must be patient as God works out his purposes

in our lives. We can't always see God's purposes from our vantage point. We must trust him. He will "bring us back" safely to that place he has for us.

Jacob Promises to Tithe (28:22)

"... Of all that you give me I will give you a tenth." (28:22)

Why does Jacob promise to tithe, that is, give one tenth of all that God gives him? His grandfather Abraham had tithed to Melchizedek, king of (Jeru)salem and priest of the Most High God (14:18-20), so there is some family tradition. But what does tithing mean in this context?

Tithing as a Recognition of God's Supply

So Jacob says:

"... Of all that **you give** me I will give you a tenth." (28:22)

Jacob's faith is both that God will supply -- and that the resources are ultimately God's. His tithe is a recognition of that.

My point is that Jacob's vow to tithe all that God gives him is both a statement of faith that God will meet his needs, and a vow of loyalty and submission to the Lord as his King and God. (When you ask *who* Jacob ended up tithing to, however, I run out of answers.)

I believe that tithing for the Christian represents something similar. We see ourselves as stewards of what actually belongs to God. And the tithe of our income is a way of demonstrating our allegiance, our love, and that we serve God rather than Money (Matthew 6:24).

Ultimately, tithing isn't about money but about discipleship. Tithing is a powerful indicator to us that we trust God and have committed our lives to him. And so it was for Jacob.