

The God of Jacob

Printed Text · Genesis 28:10–22

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: AFFIRM that God's strength meets us in our human weakness, SYMPATHIZE with Jacob's feeling weak and vulnerable, and RESOLVE to make time for God to refresh us when we feel weak.

In Focus

Pastor Bob had been the full-time senior pastor at his church for decades. He preached two services every Sunday and made it a point to be at Sunday School and a church ministry meeting every day of the week. He also faithfully fulfilled all his administrative, pastoral care, and sermon preparation work. Then one Sunday, he found out that his younger brother had died in a car accident. Then, his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. One of his associate ministers told him a former deacon was spreading rumors about him mismanaging money. On top of this, Pastor Bob had preached through illness three times already this year. He decided, in the midst of all he was going through, that something had to be done.

His associate pastor Fred said, "Pastor Bob, the congregation needs you to be healthy, and we need a new vision for the next year. I think it may be time for you to take a sabbatical. You should take at least three months to take care of yourself and your family. The church will be OK while you're away." Pastor Bob looked down. He knew his associate minister was right. He needed God to meet him with strength during his time of weakness.

Why do people wait until they are overwhelmed to seek God for restoration? Have you had a time when you needed God to restore you, but were afraid to take the time to care for yourself amid other responsibilities?

Keep In Mind

"And, 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." (Genesis 28:15, KJV)

"What's more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you." (Genesis 28:15, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Lighted upon (v. 11) paga' (Heb.)—To meet, to encounter, to attack.

B. Vow (v. 20) neder (Heb.)—A solemn oath or promise.

Say It Correctly

Beersheba. beer-SHE-buh.

Haran. heh-RON.

KJV Genesis 28:10-22

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

11 And 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.

12 And 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.

13 And, 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;

14 And 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.

15 And, 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.

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

17 And 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.

18 And 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.

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

20 And 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,

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

22 And 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.

NLT Genesis 28:10-22

10 Meanwhile, Jacob left Beersheba and traveled toward Haran.

11 At sundown, he arrived at a good place to set up camp and stopped there for the night. Jacob found a stone to rest his head against and lay down to sleep.

12 As he slept, he dreamed of a stairway that reached from the earth up to heaven. And he saw the angels of God going up and down the stairway.

13 At the top of the stairway stood the LORD, and he said, “I am the LORD, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants.

14 Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants.

15 What’s more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day, I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you.”

16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I wasn’t even aware of it!”

17 But he was also afraid and said, “What an awesome place this is! It is none other than the house of God, the very gateway to heaven!”

18 The next morning, Jacob got up very early. He took the stone he had rested his head against, and he set it upright as a memorial pillar. Then he poured olive oil over it.

19 He named that place Bethel (which means “house of God”), although it was previously called Luz.

20 Then Jacob made this vow: “If God will indeed be with me and protect me on this journey, and if he will provide me with food and clothing,

21 and if I return safely to my father’s home, then the LORD will certainly be my God.

22 And this memorial pillar I have set up will become a place for worshiping God, and I will present to God a tenth of everything he gives me.”

The People, Places, and Times

Bethel. Located about twelve miles north of Jerusalem and west of the Jordan River, Bethel has many significant connections to Old Testament events. Bethel was initially called Luz and belonged to the Canaanites. Upon his entry into Canaan, Abraham set up camp between Bethel and Ai (Genesis 12:8). It is here that Abraham worshiped God when he returned from Egypt (13:3–4). When Jacob fled from Beersheba to Haran, he spent the night here and dreamed of a ladder reaching to heaven with angels climbing up and down (28:11–12). This prompted Jacob to rename the city from Luz to Bethel, which means “house of God” (v. 19).

During times of trouble, the people of Israel went to Bethel to seek counsel of God (Judges 20:18; 21:2). It was also at Bethel that the Ark of the Covenant was entrusted to the care of Aaron’s grandson, Phinehas (20:26–28). After the nation was divided, Bethel was included in the northern kingdom of Israel and became the official center of worship. Under King Jeroboam, Bethel became a site of idol worship (1 Kings 12:28–33) and was not purged of its idols until the reign of King Josiah of Judah (2 Kings 23:15). The author of Hebrews speaks of a “heavenly Jerusalem” (Hebrews 12:22) to denote the beauty and security of the New Covenant. The book of Revelation refers to “the holy city, new Jerusalem” (21:2, KJV) and “that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God” (21:10, KJV). Here, the angel identifies the city with the bride, the Church. The following description, in which Jerusalem is massive and radiant with jewels and perfect in symmetry, shows the wonderful destiny of God’s people when He will dwell among them forever.

Background

Jacob had stolen the blessing and birthright of his brother Esau by tricking him and their father, Isaac. Isaac believed he was nearing death in old age and was concerned about his descendants inheriting God's promise. (In reality, Isaac lived for many more decades after this incident, as noted in Genesis 35:28–29.) Rebekah, the mother of Esau and Jacob, knew that Esau would seek revenge on Jacob for this deceit, so she decided to send Jacob to live with his uncle Laban in Haran. She also recognized that Jacob could find a wife from her own family rather than marrying a local woman in Canaan. Neither Isaac nor Rebekah wanted their children to marry Canaanite women, who worshiped different gods and could affect the inheritance of the promise. Isaac sent Jacob to the same place where Abraham had instructed him to find a wife: the house of Bethuel and Laban in Haran.

During his long journey from Beersheba to Haran in search of a wife, Jacob felt weary and decided to rest in the wilderness near Luz, which is where our Scripture takes place. Meanwhile, Esau learned of the prohibition against marrying Canaanite women and attempted to gain favor with his father by marrying an Ishmaelite. However, this did not change Esau's situation.

At-A-Glance

1. Resting in the Promise (Genesis 28:10–12)
2. Renewing the Promise (vv. 13–17)
3. Remembering the Promise (vv. 18–22)

In Depth

1. Resting in the Promise (Genesis 28:10–12)

Jacob is traveling from the house of his father Isaac in Beersheba, Canaan, to his uncle Laban's home in Haran. During his journey, he stops at sunset near the city of Luz. Jacob's decision to make this journey to find a wife from his family line shows his obedience to his parents. However, he now walks through the wilderness alone, as he had tricked his brother. Feeling too tired to continue his journey through the night, Jacob sets up camp and decides to rest his head on a rock as he falls asleep. While he sleeps, he dreams of a stairway reaching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it. In his dream, Jacob realizes that there is a connection between earth and heaven in that location. With this dream, God shows that He knows how to get Jacob's attention. Why is it important for God to get Jacob's attention and our attention?

2. Renewing the Promise (vv. 13–17)

God identifies Himself as “the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac” (Genesis 28:13). This declaration establishes that Jacob is in the presence of God, who is honored and revered by both his father and grandfather. In this moment, God reaffirms the covenant blessings He had promised to Abraham and Isaac, which include land, numerous progeny, protection, and His presence. God's faithfulness to His promise does not change despite Jacob's choices or circumstances. Jacob receives this blessing when he reaches the place that God intended for him to be blessed. It is important to remember that for some of us, our blessings may only come once we arrive at the location where God desires us to receive them. At this point, Jacob was a fugitive, fleeing from his brother's wrath, which made him an unlikely candidate for God's selection. Jacob's actions toward his father and brother

showed him to be a thief and a deceiver. Yet, despite this, God chose him to be the steward of the great covenant.

When Jacob awakens from his dream, he is astonished. He has encountered God directly. No longer does he have to rely on the testimonies of his father or grandfather; he now knows without a doubt, “Surely the LORD is in this place” (Genesis 28:16). Jacob recognizes that God is right there where he stands! Not only is God present, but He has also promised Jacob the very blessings that he had previously tried to steal. Jacob is no longer alone or running from his past. He now has God’s promise: “I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of” (v. 15). Instead of fleeing from his past, Jacob now holds the hope of a future that is rightfully his. He moves from being alone with nothing to being renewed in purpose and in the presence of the Lord, who will provide everything he needs. Jacob described this place as “dreadful,” indicating his awe of the mighty God. Why is it so important for God to reveal Himself and His promises to Jacob?

3. Remembering the Promise (vv. 18–22)

Outside of this Canaanite city in the wilderness, God chose to reveal His presence to Jacob. It is no surprise that Jacob wanted to preserve the memory of this incredible experience by erecting a memorial. Using the very stone he had used as a pillow, he made an altar and anointed it as an act of consecration. This act is reminiscent of his grandfather Abraham, who similarly built an altar at the site where God had appeared to him (Genesis 13:18).

This serves as an excellent reminder to Christian parents, grandparents, and caregivers: our children are always watching us. We must model godly behavior and provide examples of worship and thanksgiving. Our praise, worship, and acts of gratitude are not private matters; they should be demonstrated daily. What are some the consequences of parents not being good role models?

Search the Scriptures

1. What does Bethel mean (Genesis 28:19)?
2. What does God promise Jacob (vv. 13–15)?
3. What does Jacob promise God (vv. 20–22)?

Discuss The Meaning

1. When Jacob found himself tired from running, God provided him with rest and spoke to him. Are there times when God has slowed you down or made you take a break to communicate with you?
2. Jacob received a great blessing from God at a moment when his actions made him feel the least deserving. Can you recall a time when you were certain that God confirmed His promises to you, even when you felt undeserving or weak?

Liberating Lesson

It can be challenging for individuals to find resources, opportunities, and a renewed sense of purpose in society after wandering in a metaphorical wilderness because of their own actions or their circumstances. Whether we are talking about people recovering from addiction, returning from prison, or refugees escaping violence, many people experience feelings of isolation and have limited resources on their path to renewed promise. *How can we show mercy and establish places of rest and renewal within our congregations for those who are striving to change and find purpose when they are returning to a community?*

Application For Activation

Balancing our careers and family responsibilities often makes it challenging for many of us to spend “quiet time” with the Lord. However, if we want to hear Him, we need to prioritize finding that time. Aim to set aside time early in the morning, late in the evening, or at any other time, for a few moments dedicated just to you and God. Create a quiet space away from others, and turn off distractions like the TV and phone. Start by praying, then read the Scriptures, and allow God to speak to you through His Word.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Genesis 28:10–22

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

11 And 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.

In obedience to his father’s command to seek a wife (Genesis 28:2) and in compliance with his mother’s advice to avoid Esau’s wrath, Jacob set out on his journey to Haran. As he traveled from Beersheba to Haran, he arrived at a location where he had to stop for the night because the sun had set. Although Jacob might have intended to reach Luz, he chose to rest at that spot since it was getting dark. The phrase “lighted upon” comes from the Hebrew word *pagaʿ* (paw-GAH), which can be translated as “to meet,” “to encounter,” or “to attack,” and indicates that this stop was unplanned. However, this stop was divinely appointed; the place Jacob rested had already been consecrated by his grandfather Abraham (12:8, 13:4). Jacob gathered some stones and used them as a pillow. In those days, hard headrests were commonly used for sleeping, unlike the soft cushions we have today.

12 And 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.

Jacob fell asleep and had a dream in which he saw a ladder (Heb. *sullam*, sool-LAWM) resting on the earth, with its top reaching toward heaven. Angels of God were ascending and descending on it. While the exact etymology of the Hebrew word for “ladder” is somewhat uncertain, its meaning and symbolism are clear. The ladder served as a visible representation

of the continuous and intimate connection between God in heaven and His people on earth. The presence of the angels, who are God's messengers, emphasized that God wanted to communicate with Jacob.

Additionally, dreams often served as a means of divine revelation in the Old Testament. As Jacob slept, he experienced a profound dream that provided him with insight into the power of God. In ancient days, gods were thought to be confined by certain physical boundaries, but also had special places where heaven touched earth. As Jacob saw the ladder stretched from heaven to earth, God revealed to Jacob that He was available and accessible. What a much-needed, refreshing, and inspiring experience for Jacob! God showed up for him at the right time. Jacob was tired, lonely, and forlorn when he arrived at Bethel. He had no company to travel with, no place but the ground for a bed, and no pillow but a stone for his head, but he experienced God in a personal and unusual way. The doors to his family and Beersheba were shut, but the window of heaven was wide open to him. God showed a ladder of hope to a hopeless Jacob, who was caught up in a problem of his own making. For a short while, God made His presence, promise, and providence accessible to Jacob. God never ceases to seek a relationship with humanity, and He continues to communicate with humanity in unexpected ways.

13 And, 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. 14 And 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.

The vision was not just about angels. The Lord stood above the ladder, a personal revelation to Jacob. By identifying Himself as the God of Jacob's ancestors, God confirmed the promises made to Abraham and the blessings of Isaac (Genesis 28:3-4). He assured Jacob of protection during his journey and a safe return. God emphasized His role as a promise-keeper through generations and reinforced the promise of the land, stating that "through you shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (v. 14). The promise to make Jacob's children "as the dust of the earth" directly quotes a previous promise to Abraham (Genesis 13:14-16). In that context, God uses this simile to emphasize the vast number of descendants.

15 And, 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.

Through a dream, God reaffirmed to Jacob the promises he made to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-5, 18-20; 17:1-8; 22:16-18) and Isaac (Genesis 26:3-5, 24). He communicated the prosperity that would come to Jacob's descendants and reassured the anxious patriarch of His presence during this perilous journey. The Hebrew word for "leave" is *azab* (aw-ZAB), which also translates as "forsake" or "abandon." Its frequent usage between God and His people reinforces God's covenantal promise to always be with His people.

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

When Jacob wakes from the dream, he understands that God has chosen this place as His unique residence. In that moment, Jacob realizes that God had been with him even when he

was unaware of it. Jacob had fallen asleep feeling fearful, helpless, alone, sorrowful, and anxious, without any thought that he was especially cared for or watched over by the God of Abraham. However, God offers him a promise of future generations and a continued presence with them.

17 And 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.

Jacob comes to, a feeling of awe washes over him, and he expresses how special this place is. He refers to it as the “house of God” (Heb. bet elohim; BATE eh-lo-HEEM), a name he would soon give to the site: “Bethel” (28:19). The term “gate of heaven” is unique to this passage in the Old Testament, but the idea that heaven, the dwelling place of the divine, has one or more entrances is a familiar concept in ancient thought. The dream Jacob experienced left a profound impression on him, leading him to declare, “How dreadful is this place!” Here, the word “dreadful” is translated from the Hebrew yare’ (yaw-RAY), which means both “to be afraid” and “to stand in awe or godly fear.” This characterizes things, whether positive or negative, that prompt deep contemplation. As Jacob continued his journey, he was meant to carry with him a deep sense of awe for the gracious presence of God.

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

The appearance of the ladder, with the Lord standing at its top and the movement of the angels, gave Jacob a deep sense of God’s commitment to uphold His covenant with Jacob’s ancestors. Consequently, when he awoke, he solemnly dedicated one of the stones and vowed to follow God, bringing his tithes to the God who dwelt in that place (vv. 18-22). Jacob transformed the stone he had used as a pillow into a pillar. He erected it along with other stones as a monument to the extraordinary vision he had experienced there. The word “pillar” (Heb. masseba, mats-tsay-BAW) comes from the Hebrew root word natsab (naw-TSAB), which is used in verse 13 to describe when the Lord “stood” above the ladder. This experience inspired Jacob to worship and praise the Lord. He poured oil on top of the pillar to consecrate it as a memorial of the mercy he had received. Jacob named the place Bethel, meaning “house of God,” although the town had previously been called Luz. It seems that Jacob named not just the spot where he set up the pillar, but also the surrounding town near where he had received this divine revelation.

20 And 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, 21 So that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: 22 And 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.

Jacob made a vow (Heb. neder, NEH-der). This was not an ordinary vow, but a profound and solemn declaration of Jacob’s total acceptance of the Lord as his God. The significance of this vow is highlighted by its mention at key points in Jacob’s journey (Genesis 31:13; 35:1-3, 7). In the Old Testament, vows were typically made during times of distress, and Jacob’s vow was no exception. He was in a state of distress, fleeing from home and facing the threat of death. However, he received an unexpected revelation announcing his return to his homeland and

assuring him of safety on his journey. In this moment, God revealed the future to Jacob and reaffirmed the covenant promise. God had already made an unconditional promise to Jacob, assuring him that He would watch over him and bring him back to this land (28:15). God did not demand anything in return, yet Jacob chose to present God with an altar, a tithe, and a commitment. One thing is clear from this episode: Jacob was gradually reaching a turning point in his life. Instead of relying on his abilities, he was called to stop being the “trickster,” as his name implies, and to depend on God to provide for his needs and protect him. Yet, Jacob seems to establish some conditions for this relationship, so he offered to mark the Lord’s sacred space and to tithe as a sign of his commitment. Jacob’s vow contains an “if” that reflects his journey of taking God at His word: “If God is going to do so much for me, then I will do something for Him.” His character as a bargainer did not change overnight, as he sought to understand God’s sovereign and faithful nature. Although Jacob waited until later in life to rid his household of idols—once God had demonstrated more of His promises (as seen in Genesis 35)—he nonetheless committed to God from here on out.

In other words, if God was willing to fulfill His covenant promise, Jacob would acknowledge and worship Him as his God by building an altar and tithing a portion of all his possessions. At this point, Jacob did not yet fully understand that God is sovereign and ever faithful. However, unlike Jacob, we can have faith in God’s character and do not need to bargain with Him for what He has already promised.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

You Cannot Run Away from God's Presence
(Psalm 139:7–12)

TUESDAY

The Ministry of Angels
(Hebrews 1:14)

WEDNESDAY

A New Beginning in Faith
(John 4:4–14)

THURSDAY

God Remembers His Promise at Bethel
(Genesis 31:11–13)

FRIDAY

Esau's Anger Forces Jacob to Run
(Genesis 27:41–45)

SATURDAY

Jacob leaves Beersheba and Dreams
(Genesis 28:10–15)

SUNDAY

Jacob Wakes Up and Names Bethel
(Genesis 28:16–22)