

International Sunday School Lesson Study Notes

Lesson Text: Genesis 28:10-22

Lesson Title: The Blessing Conveyed to Jacob

Introduction

Jacob was one of the great patriarchs, a father of his country, and a champion in Israelite history. In fact, if it were not for Jacob, there would be no Israelite history. Jacob was the second born twin son of Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 25). His older brother's name was Esau. Before Jacob's birth he had been divinely chosen to receive the birthright and the blessing (Genesis 25:23). In spite of that fact, Jacob spent most of his life scheming and taking advantage of Esau and others in order to get what he thought he deserved (Genesis 25:29-34).

The name "Jacob" comes from a Hebrew word meaning "may God protect." But because the pronunciation of the Hebrew word sounds like "heel," his name became a nickname meaning "heel holder" or "supplanter." When "Jacob" was born, *"...his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob"* (Genesis 25:26). When the name "Jacob" was heard or pronounced it was interpreted to mean that Jacob would trip up his brother or take advantage of him. Jacob proved to be true to his name.

Genesis 26 and 27 are interesting chapters in Jacob's life. Although Esau was the favorite son of Isaac, Jacob was the favorite son of his mother. Isaac was making plans to pass the blessing on to his favorite son, but Rebekah was not about to have Jacob left out, especially since God had told her the blessing was to be Jacob's. Rebekah devised a scheme. Her intent was to preserve for Jacob what God had intended for him. Her motive may have been noble but her actions were not. She felt she must help God fulfill His purpose. We always get in trouble when we think like that!

Some people say, "The Lord helps those who help themselves." That is not true. The truth is that God helps those who can't help themselves. What we need is patience to wait on God. Neither Rebekah nor Jacob had patience. They had not yet learned to depend on God to fulfill His own promises. Although Jacob hesitated at first to be a participant in deceiving his aging father he went ahead and became a willing participant (Genesis 27:1-29). As soon as Esau heard what had happened, he came to his father Isaac and told about Jacob's deception. From that

day forward Esau was angry, bitter, and full of hatred toward Jacob (Genesis 27:41).

The Blessing and Jacob's Dream (Genesis 28:10-12)

Verse 10-11

"And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran. 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."

Because of Esau's threat to kill Jacob, Rebekah urged Jacob to flee to her brother and stay there until Esau forgot about the stolen blessing (Genesis 27:45). Little did Rebekah know that when she sent Jacob away she would never see him again. Rebekah and Isaac had one plan for Jacob, but God had another. God's ways are always higher than ours. Whose plans are you living? Is it yours? Is it your parents? Is it your cultures?

"And Jacob went out..." are striking words indeed. He is alone. No one to talk to as he walks away from everything he holds dear. As Jacob takes his first steps away from home and the five hundred mile journey "toward Haran," there must have been a lot of thoughts going through his mind. God had promised Jacob the firstborn blessing, but Jacob had stolen it with his own lies and deception. It must have been tough for Jacob to live with Jacob!

On his way "toward Haran" and to his uncle's house, God made His first move to restore Jacob to fellowship. God always makes the first move. Jacob is fleeing but God is pursuing. Tired and exhausted from his walk and the emotional strain of the day, Jacob "lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set." The knowledge of Esau's hatred and the reality of his deceptive plans weighed heavy upon Jacob. Exhausted and despondent, Jacob "took one of the stones of the place" and "put it under his head and lay down there to sleep." Sleeping on the ground and using "stones" for pillows may have been customary for people in the Middle East but this was no ordinary man and this would turn out to be a less than ordinary night.

Verse 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."

As Jacob lay under the stars with his head on a stone, he must have reflected and thought upon all that had happened. No doubt every sound would cause his eyes to open and look for Esau. Perhaps he asked himself if all he had done was really worth it. Perhaps he wondered if he would ever be able to claim the birthright and enjoy the blessing since he had deceived his brother in getting it. Jacob no doubt thought about this and many other things.

At that moment "he dreamed." It was a "dream" of a "ladder" that "set upon the earth" and "reached to heaven." "Angels" were going up and down it. The primary purpose of this "dream" is to let Jacob know that he is not alone. God is with him. God is watching him and His "angels" are guarding him.

Note: You're not alone today. No matter what you've done, right or wrong, God is with you. He is watching over you, protecting you and He cares about you. He has a plan. And no matter how bad you've messed that up, He is still working in your life.

The Blessing and Jacob's God (Genesis 28:13-15)

Verse 13-14

"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; 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 "LORD stood above" the ladder. God was at the top of the ladder; Jacob was at the bottom. That meant there was distance between the top and the bottom, between God and Jacob. However, in spite of the distance, "the LORD...said." There was communication between Jacob and God. On his first night away from home, Jacob had his first direct message from the Lord. The "ladder" reached down to where Jacob was, down to his lowest low and his deepest need. Somehow the God of grace always reaches us no matter where we are (Isaiah 59:1).

"I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac..." This was the second time God called Himself "the God of Abraham," and it is the first time He referred to Himself as "the God of Isaac." First, He said, "I am," emphasizing the ever-present One. Second, referring to the land, God said, "the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed." The "land" promise to Abraham was to his "seed," while the restatement here is to both Jacob's seed and to Jacob himself.

Jacob's "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." No doubt Jacob had heard about the promise of the "seed" being as "the dust of the earth." But the words "spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south" may possibly been the first time Jacob realized the world wide influence God's blessing upon him and his descendants would have.

"In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" was first promised to Abraham in Genesis 12:3. In spite of all the little things that have taken place in Abraham's life, Isaac's life, and now Jacob's life, this is God's big plan!

Verse 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."

Third, God assured Jacob, "behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest..." Keep in mind that at this very moment in Jacob's life he is attempting to run away from Esau. God is reminding Jacob that he can never get beyond God's presence and God's protection. "Keep thee in all places..." must have been encouraging words. This had to be one of the worse "places" Jacob had ever been. And based on Jacob's nature it is highly possible he may just get in worse "places" in the future. Yet, God promises to be "with" Jacob and to "keep" Jacob. He does the same for His children today (Hebrews 13:5).

Fourth, God promises to "bring Jacob again into this land." At this particular moment in Jacob's life he is moving in a contrary direction to the "land" God has promised him. But that doesn't change God or God's plan for Jacob. God said, "I will bring thee again into this land." If God says, "I will," rest assured He "will."

Fifth, God promises He "will not leave" Jacob "until" He has "done that which I have spoken unto" him. "I have spoken" is the guarantee. There were no conditions for Jacob to fulfill. There were no ifs or buts; it was all of God's grace. God is not going to give up on Jacob or walk away from Jacob until He has done in and through Jacob what He designed to do. And the same is true of you if you are God's child (Jeremiah 29:11; Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 1:6).

The Blessing and Jacob's Vow (Genesis 28:16-22)

Verse 16

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

Obviously the words "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep" literally tell us what happened to Jacob when his dream was over. However, if any man needed to wake up spiritually to the Lord it was Jacob. When Jacob woke up he said, "Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not." The words mean that Jacob is under the strong influence of the presence of God. God's children should always be sensitive of His presence but that is not always the case. Part of the reason that is the case is that we, like Jacob, are so preoccupied with ourselves that it is sometimes difficult to sense God's presence.

Verse 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 "was afraid," meaning he stood in reverence and in awe of the Lord. "This is none other but the house of God" implies that Jacob sensed this was a place where God resided. The "house of God" to Jacob meant a place of protection and provision. This statement also implied that any place could be "the house of God" if God manifested His presence there. Jacob was away from the place he should be dwelling and would be away for many years to come. However, it must have been comforting to know the Lord could meet him wherever he was.

"This is the gate of heaven" denotes a sense of nearness and openness of communion. A "gate" is something that grants or denies access. Jacob can't go home and he doesn't know how much longer he can go on but after this miraculous dream he senses that he has access to God. This place is now special to Jacob because of God's manifest presence.

Verse 18-19

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

Jacob realizes the importance and significance of this special relationship he has with the Lord. He "took the stone that he had for his pillows" and "set it up for a pillar" or a memorial to this most memorable meeting he had experienced with the Lord. It was customary for memorials to be erected to remember great events such

as battles, triumphs, etc. When future generations would come by these memorials they served as reminders of what the Lord had done for His people (1 Samuel 7:12).

By "pouring oil upon the top of it" Jacob signifies that this is a sanctified place. It is also possible that the "oil" was the only gift Jacob had with him to pour out unto the Lord. "Oil" was valuable and significant in the Old Testament. This action on Jacob's part speaks highly of the value Jacob placed upon this place and God's revelation of Himself to him.

Jacob changes the name of this place from "Luz" to "Bethel." "Bethel" means "the house of God." By renaming the site Jacob made a lasting statement about the meeting he had there with the living God. There is no temple built or lasting structure, just a stone memorial for all who pass by to remember that God had met with Jacob.

Our God cannot be contained in a building of mortar or wood. Even our church buildings do not contain Almighty God. There are certainly places that are special to us because God met with us there. All of us need to be reminded that "Bethel" is wherever our Lord meets with us. The hospital bed, the assisted living facility, our living rooms, and especially our places of prayer can be "Bethel's."

Verse 20-22

"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, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: 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 did one final thing at the place of his dream. He "vowed a vow." "If" has been a word much debated and discussed among Bible commentators. A careful reading of the text along with a proper understanding of Jacob's character brings us to the conclusion that Jacob has a few conditions of his own in relation to God and his future. This is interesting because God did not have any conditions in His promises to Jacob, but Jacob's heart was not yet at home in the presence of God. It is sometimes difficult to trust God completely when we have been accustomed to making our own plans and running our own lives. This was Jacob's problem and it is also ours.

Jacob's promise to give God "the tenth" is interesting in light of the fact that the Law concerning the giving of the tithe was not yet implemented. It speaks of Jacob's voluntary act of gratitude in giving to God. Jacob knew that anything he had was given to him by God and God was worthy to receive "the tenth" back.

Conclusion

Sometimes we read the stories in the Bible of men like Jacob and wonder how they ever made it. One minute they are moving forward in faith and the next they take two steps backward. When you study Jacob's life you have to wonder why God even dealt with him or spoke to him. And yet, God had a purpose and a plan for Jacob.

In today's lesson Jacob had not yet found his rightful place in the plan of God and he didn't fully understand what it meant to be in the presence of God. Jacob still measured God by himself and thought of God only as a partner. It was hard for Jacob at this point in his life to comprehend who God really was. But Jacob is growing.

When Jacob awoke from his dream he started on a 20 year journey that would allow him to experience what he needed to appreciate the Lord and His purpose in his life. Many of those experiences would bring him to the end of himself and open his understanding and appreciation of God. The Lord knew exactly what Jacob needed and He knows exactly what you need. Jacob is a reminder of the words Paul wrote about himself in Philippians 3:14, *"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* His dream at Bethel was just one marker on the journey.

Amen.