

DHW

**LESSON 21**

*THE BOOK OF GENESIS*

**CHAPTER 28**

*INTRODUCTION*

It was a sad tale for Isaac and family. Isaac, who was old and almost blind, became stubborn in his ways to the extent of going against the will of God. The family seemed to be divided into two, Isaac loved Esau and they got along quite well, whereas Rebekah loved Jacob. It is evident that they did not communicate with one another as they should, and this communication breakdown had led them to do the wrong things which had caused them to hurt one another. In this chapter, we can see the family gradually breaking up.

It is true that God hates sin and He never condones sin. And those who sin will eventually bear the consequences of their sinful acts. But God is Sovereign and in control. He is gracious and merciful, He cares for His people. Above all else, He is ever faithful to His promises

and Word. What He has promised and said will certainly happen. In the case of the family of Isaac and Rebekah, God had clearly revealed His plan and purpose concerning Jacob. But Isaac and Rebekah did not trust God to do things in His way and at His time. But they did the things in their own way, which they should not have done in order to serve their own self-interest. They eventually paid a heavy price for their actions.

The chapter can be divided into the following sections:

- (1) Isaac blessed and sent Jacob to Padan-aram (28:1-5);
- (2) Esau took another wife to please his parents (28:6-9);
- (3) God appeared to Jacob in a dream (28:10-15);
- (4) Jacob renamed the place, where he had the dream, Bethel (28:16-19);
- (5) Jacob made a vow to God (28:20-22).

*STUDY THE WORD*

**Isaac Blesses and Sends Jacob to Padan-aram**

Isaac sent Jacob away with his full blessing. This time he willingly and openly blessed Jacob even in

stronger terms. Isaac had undergone a change of heart. He now recognized that Jacob was the true heir of the Abrahamic Covenant. Earlier he was shaken by God for secretly trying to bless Esau instead of Jacob. Isaac's blessing upon Jacob consisted of two parts. The first part pertains to his charge to Jacob not to marry outside his own people and kindred. The purpose of going to Padan-aram insofar as Isaac was concerned, was for Jacob to take a wife from among the daughters of Laban.

The second part of his blessing upon Jacob is the reiteration of the covenant blessings, which God had made with Abraham. He used the name, "God Almighty," (Hebrew, *El Shaddai*, 17:1). God made a covenant with Abraham and sealed with the sign of circumcision. He now recognized that Jacob as God-chosen heir of the covenantal blessings which God had made with Abraham. God's name, *El Shaddai*, assured Jacob that he would inherit the land. He pronounced that God Almighty would bless him, make him prosperous and give him many descendants, and that the covenant blessings, which He made with Abraham, would be passed down to him and his "seed." That the word

"seed" is singular is significant. Here is a reference to the final seed in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The editorial report in verse 5 mentions the name of Jacob, the younger brother first, and then Esau. It is not a mistake made by Moses. It is deliberate for Jacob was now the rightful heir of Abraham's blessings because God had chosen him to receive them. Throughout Scriptures the true and living God would be known as the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.<sup>1</sup>

### Esau Takes Another Wife

Isaac had charged Jacob *not to take a wife of the daughters of Canaan* but to take a wife from the daughters of Laban, Rebekah's brother, in Padan-aram. When Esau saw that taking a wife from the same kindred pleased his father Isaac, he went and took another wife, for his first two wives were Canaanites. He chose his cousin, a daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son. Esau was

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<sup>1</sup> **Genesis 32:9** *And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee:*

**Exodus 3:6** *Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face: for he was afraid to look upon God.*

still thinking about his father's blessing, and this marriage to his cousin would please his father and consequently get his blessing. Ishmael was the outcast son of Abraham. So this marriage would not have pleased Isaac. Esau displayed a lack of spiritual discernment as the firstborn blessing had to be given to Jacob, God's chosen heir. He had only a present interest of the promise and not the prophetic future. The only thing that is commendable on the part of Esau is that he was sensitive to his father's feelings.

### **God Appears to Jacob in a Dream**

Jacob had a long journey to travel. Padan-aram was about 640 kilometres (400 miles) north of Beersheba. What thoughts could have run through his mind taking into consideration that Jacob had a homely disposition and seldom ventured out of the house? There would definitely be fears of what was coming ahead. If he turned back, there was Esau, who wanted to kill him. When would he be able to see his mother and father again? How long would he have to stay in Padan-aram? Was the blessing he received from his father worth all the effort and the problems? There

were so many uncertainties ahead, and surely this parting was sad for the parents, especially Rebekah. It was a bitter lesson for Jacob and Rebekah. They had to reap what they had sown.

Jacob travelled for about 80 kilometres (50 miles) and reached a certain place which was between Beersheba and Haran. It is later revealed as the city of Luz, which Jacob renamed as Bethel (v.19). When he reached Luz it was getting dark and travel was impossible after sunset. He decided to rest and to spend the night there. He took stones to improvise as his pillow. He must have been exhausted and tired. That night he dreamt of a stairway stretching from earth to heaven. God's angels were ascending and descending on the stairway. At the top of the stairway there stood the LORD, who spoke to him. There are three elements in the LORD'S Word to him: firstly, the LORD introduced Himself as the God of Abraham and of Isaac; secondly, the LORD reiterated the covenant promises to Abraham that the land on which he was lying would be given to him and his posterity, his descendants would be as "the dust" spreading to the four corners of the earth, and in his *seed* all the families

of the earth would be blessed; and thirdly, the LORD assured him that He would be with him, to protect and preserve him wherever he would be to bring him back to the land, and that He would not forsake him (verses 13, 14, 15).

This revelation of the LORD to Jacob was precisely what Jacob needed. It removed any doubt of his rightful position and succession in the covenant, which God made with Abraham and Isaac. From now onwards the LORD God identifies Himself as the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob. Jacob's fear of whether he could return to the land was allayed. It also assured him that whatever uncertainties there might be ahead of him, the LORD would preserve and protect him. Indeed this reassurance from the LORD raised his confidence and comforted him.

This dream of the *ladder* (stairway) is also of important significance to us as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ referred this dream to Nathanael (John 1:51): *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.* Just as Jacob was being reminded that the LORD God would

be with him and was able to protect and preserve him, believers in Christ are also being reminded the same through the Lord Jesus Christ, their only way to God the Father (John 14:6). What an encouragement to all born-again Christians!

Our LORD God cares for us – a precious truth that should comfort us. In the time of our greatest need, He will similarly be there for us. God has thousands upon thousands of angels. Angels are God's agents to guard, communicate, rescue, and protect us at His bidding. Another comforting and encouraging truth about the LORD our God is that despite Jacob's sin God did not write him off. God kept to His Word, which He gave to Rebekah (25:23). We can be rest assured that the security of our salvation cannot be broken. It is true that Christians sometimes sin, as John the Apostle points out – *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us* (John 1:8). The basis of the security of our salvation rests irrevocably on God's Word and promises. It is not of works. But this does not mean that we can excuse ourselves from doing good works. God saves us so that we will be zealous of doing good works to

glorify our Father in Heaven (Matthew 5:16).

### Jacob Renames the Place Bethel

When Jacob awoke, his spiritual senses were heightened. He was overwhelmed by his dream. His first response was one of terrifying fear. But it was not just terrifying fear but of adoration in the awesomeness of God – *how dreadful is this place* (v.17). This attitude of fear was appropriate. It is a worshipful fear. Then he renamed the place *Bethel* which was formerly called Luz (v. 19). The word Bethel means “the house of God” (*Beth* means house, *el* means God). There was neither an actual “house of God” nor an actual “gate of heaven,” but these expressions indicated that he acknowledged the presence of God. He erected a pillar of stones to commemorate his experience there. Then he poured oil on the pillar of stones, which he had erected. The pouring of oil was a symbolic act of offering a sacrifice to the LORD. There was no animal sacrifice because he had none with him. This ritual act demonstrated his devotion and consecration to the LORD. Jacob’s appropriate

response to God’s revelation serves as an example to us. Like Jacob, we ought to fear, and adore God, and give our lives a living sacrifice to Him which is our reasonable service (Romans 12:1).

### JACOB MAKES A VOW

Jacob’s consecration to the LORD was evidenced by the vow he made. A vow is a solemn promise to behave in a certain way, perform a certain deed, reach some goal, or make a certain gift. It would be profitable for our learning to evaluate Jacob’s vow. The “if” clauses in his vow put some conditions upon God: *if God will be with me, and will keep (protect) me in this way that go, and will give (provide) 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 of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee* (vv. 20-22).

His vow is not commendable. What he was saying is that, unless God blessed him, he would not accept the LORD as his God. It was not the language of faith. If one has faith in God, does he bargain with Him? God had been so gracious and

merciful to him in spite of his sinful dealings towards his family members. Had not God spoken to him in the dream and made all those promises, which even more than his vow? One should not behave like Jacob but trust the LORD our God at His Word implicitly. The negative comment about Jacob's vow is that it was self-centred. In three verses (20-22) the use of the first person personal pronoun "I/me," adds to no less than ten times. He was unappreciatively calculative.

May be a good point of Jacob's response to God's revelation and blessings is that Jacob was prepared to offer ten percent of all that God would bless him with. It was voluntary. The Mosaic Law was not implemented yet. The giving of the tithe is an acknowledgment that all of one's possessions belong to God (Genesis 14:20). The tithe is a token gesture. It belongs to God. This is a good guideline of our offering to God. It is a timeless principle.

### PRACTICAL VALUE

One of the greatest comforting truths that we learn in this chapter is that the LORD our God deals with us in a way that we do not deserve.

He showed Jacob great mercy and grace even though he had broken so many of His commandments. Indeed, we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Jacob had a lot to learn, and we will see this in the ensuing chapters. In the meantime, how God dealt with him is a comfort to us; our circumstances and our status are all due to His loving-kindness and tender-mercies. God will teach us His ways down the road of life which may be painful but it is for our own good.

God has many angels. We know this from God's appearance to Jacob in the dream. In a desolate place and alone, tired and exhausted, he had this dream in which God appeared to him. This was the first time God spoke to him directly. Angels (Hebrew: *malak* means messenger) are God's ministers, who are ever ready anytime, anywhere to do God's bidding.<sup>2</sup> How often our lives have been protected or preserved by God's angels who had intervened on our

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<sup>2</sup> **Psalm 104:4** *Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire:*

**Psalm 91:11** *For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.*

behalf! Every day, we should be thankful to God, and this is pleasing before God.

Another important lesson is that Christians should trust God and take His Word seriously at face value. Jacob, instead of trusting God implicitly regarding the promises that God had spoken to him, bargained with God when making a vow. What was His vow to God? He expected many things from God and he promised to give only ten percent of all that he expected from God. His vow was nothing compared with God's promise, which He was able to fulfil. But sad to say that many Christians do not show that they take God's Word seriously. For if they have taken God's Word and promises seriously, their lives would have been different for good. For example, our Lord Jesus declares that whoever seeks the kingdom of God and its righteousness first, that person's needs and more will be given to him (Matthew 6:33). Seeking His righteousness first is to worship on the Lord's Sabbath, and serve Him by doing good works to glorify Him. Man ought to pray and not to faint, and are we faithfully attending prayer meetings? How many times

are our prayers just like Jacob's self-centredness? We should seek to praise and thank God more and to do the things that please Him.  
AMEN