

Introduction
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1. What we've learned about Jacob up to this point:
  - a. He was the more peaceful and civilized brother
  - b. He understood and valued the birthright and blessing of his father
  - c. He was both shrewd and deceptive in how he went about securing the birthright and blessing
2. What we haven't seen so far is any indication of a relationship with the LORD:
  - a. He was raised in a home where both parents knew the LORD
  - b. In fact, Genesis 26 reveals a fairly intimate relationship between God and Isaac:
    - 1) God appeared and spoke to him twice
    - 2) Isaac obeyed His commands, experienced His blessings, worshipped Him, and even recognized God's provision in his life
    - 3) The relationship between God and Isaac was so obvious that even King Abimelech recognized it
  - c. We don't have as many details about Rebekah's relationship with the LORD, but do know at least three things:
    - 1) She was raised in a home that was familiar with the LORD and seemed to recognize Him as superior to all other gods
    - 2) When her family recognized that it was the LORD's will for her to go back to Canaan with Abraham's servant and marry Isaac, she didn't hesitate and immediately returned with him
    - 3) She also sought God's help with her pregnancy, and He responded by speaking with her
  - d. So, while we know a fair amount about Isaac's and Rebekah's relationship with the LORD, we've seen nothing up to this point to suggest Jacob had a relationship with the LORD:
    - 1) He certainly would have known about the LORD because of his parents
    - 2) But, knowing about Him is not the same thing as knowing Him or having a relationship with Him
3. That all changed when he had his first encounter with God which is the focus of our passage today:
  - a. Jacob had two encounters with the LORD and they both had a profound impact on his life
  - b. The first is recorded here in Genesis 28:10-22 and the second is some 20 years later when he wrestled with God

A. The LORD revealed Himself and His promises to Jacob (READ Genesis 28:10-15)

1. If you remember from last week, Issac and Rebekah sent Jacob on a journey back to Mesopotamia:
  - a. This was in part because Esau wanted to Kill Jacob after losing his birthright and blessing to him
  - b. However, more importantly Isaac and Rebekah forbid him from marrying a Canaanite wife like Esau had done, and sent him to Rebekah's family to find a wife
2. Along the way he stopped for the night and had a dream:
  - a. In his dream he saw a ladder (or could be stairway) with the bottom resting on the earth and the top **"touching heaven"**
  - b. Along this ladder he saw **"the angels of God ascending and descending on it"**
  - c. It's not exactly clear what this represents:
    - 1) Depending on which commentary or Bible teacher you listen to, you'll get varied opinions, but nothing definitive
    - 2) Some claim that the ladder is a type of Christ:
      - a) This is because Jesus used similar language in John 1:51 (READ)
      - b) However, I believe this is a bit of a stretch because it's not clear Jesus was referencing this event with Jacob
      - c) In fact, the only similarities between the two passages are the angels ascending/descending, in Jacob's case on the ladder and in Jesus' case Himself
    - 3) I think it's more likely that the ladder and the angels ascending and descending simply represented God's presence in the land, mostly because this is how Jacob seemed to interpret it (READ 17)
3. When the LORD spoke to Isaac in the dream, He began by introducing Himself by name (RE-READ 28:13a):
  - a. Most English translations say that the LORD **"stood above"** the ladder, but as noted in the marginal notes in many Bibles this can also be translated as **"the LORD stood beside him"** (as the HSB); Jacob's comment in v. 16 seem to support the latter
  - b. God introduced Himself by saying, **"I am Yahweh, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac..."**:
    - 1) This is important because Jacob most likely would have been familiar with the stories of his father's and grandfather's interactions with Yahweh
    - 2) But, it also suggests that while Jacob may have KNOWN ABOUT Yahweh, he may not have necessarily have KNOWN Yahweh

Before accepting Christ, I knew about God and Jesus Christ; I went to church and would even pray to God, but I didn't come to know him until Bob shared the Gospel with me

- 3) While we don't know specifically about what kind of relationship Jacob had or didn't have with Yahweh, his reaction to this encounter certainly suggests God had never appeared to him before
4. After introducing Himself to Jacob, God made a series of four promises to him, and they reflect the same promises God made to Abraham and Isaac (28:13-15):
  - a. The first involved **POSSESSION** of the land of Canaan (READ 13)
  - b. The second involved **PROGENY** (READ 14a)
  - c. The third involved God's **PLAN** (READ 14b)
  - d. The fourth involved God's **PRESENCE** and **PROTECTION** (READ 15)
5. What we see here is God promising to continue the promises He made to Abraham through Isaac, and thus confirming His promises and covenant with Jacob
6. Takeaway: God is a personal God who desires to not only be in a relationship with us but He wants to bless us as well; the greatest example of this is Jesus Christ:
  - a. God has revealed Himself to mankind through Jesus:
    - 1) He is "**Immanuel**", God with us, and the One who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1, 14)
    - 2) He is the one who revealed the Father to the disciples, and continues to reveal Him to us (John 17:26)
  - b. God made it possible for us to have a relationship with Him through Jesus: sin separated us from God, but He provided a means to fix that broken relationship (READ Colossians 1:19-22)
  - c. He even blesses us through Jesus (Romans 8:32): "**He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?**"

**\*\*All of this is meaningless, however, if we don't respond when God makes Himself known, and if it doesn't change our lives as it did Jacob**

<b>B. Jacob's encounter with God changed his life (READ 28:16-22)</b>
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1. First, Jacob responded by acknowledging God's presence (READ 16):
  - a. In v. 17 he refers to the place as "**the House of God**" and the "**gate of heaven**"
  - b. Jacob's statement regarding the LORD being in this place but not knowing it is interesting because his grandfather Abraham lived just outside Bethel on two different occasions, built an altar there, and worshipped God (Genesis 12:8; 13:2)
2. Second, Jacob responded by expressing fear and reverence (READ 17):
  - a. There's some word play here with the word "**fear**": more literally something akin to "**He feared and said, 'how fearful is this place!'**"

- b. The word used here can refer to actual fear, but it's also used to describe deep reverence and respect for something, especially God
  - c. What this tells us is that proper reverence or respect for God includes a certain amount fear; we cannot separate the two
- 3. Third, Jacob responded by memorializing the encounter (READ 18-19):
  - a. By setting up a pillar, consecrating it with oil, and renaming the place Bethel (which means House of God), Jacob was memorializing the place at which he encountered God
  - b. Jacob was apparently fond of setting up pillars as memorials because he did it on at least three other occasions:
    - 1) He set one up to memorialize the covenant with Laban (31:45)
    - 2) He set another one up to memorialize the place where he had wrestled with God (35:14)
    - 3) He also set one a pillar to memorialize his wife Rachel after she died in childbirth (35:20)
- 4. Fourth, and finally, Jacob responded by promising to make Yahweh his God (READ 20-22):
  - a. Some view Jacob's vow was only half-hearted and not all that genuine:
    - 1) Those who propose this say he was bargaining with God by placing conditions on his vow:
    - 2) **IF** God would be with him, and **IF** he would provide him with food and clothes, and **IF** He would return him back home, **THEN AND ONLY THEN** would Jacob make the LORD his God and make tithes to Him
    - 3) This is the view presented in the commentary notes of the ESV study bible which states, "The conditional nature of Jacob's vow reveals that he is still ambivalent regarding his commitment to the Lord. Although God reveals himself to Jacob at Bethel, it will require a further personal encounter before Jacob fully trusts in the Lord (a reference to his later wrestling match with God)"
  - b. The alternative view is that Jacob's vow was genuine and an honest commitment to God:
    - 1) I will spare you the gory details, but the technical commentaries I consulted about this verse suggest the then clause of Jacob's vow actually begins at the beginning of v. 22 rather than the end of v. 21: **"If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, AND (rather than "then") the LORD will be my God, then this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."**
    - 2) Others view Jacob's "if" in the sense of "since": "Since God will be with me...and keep me...and give me...and I will return to my father's house...then He will be my God" (know as a 1<sup>st</sup> class conditional clause where the protasis is assumed to be true)

- 3) Both of these are possible technically, but for me the greatest evidence that Jacob's vow was genuine is what's recorded in Genesis 31:13: **"I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me..."**
  - a) In this verse Jacob was recounting a dream in which God had appeared to Him
  - b) At face value, God's word suggest **He** took Jacob's vow as genuine
  - c) Plus, the fact that Jacob set up the pillar as a memorial to commemorate the event suggests this
5. Takeaway: Jacob's response to God gives us an example of what a genuine response and commitment to God should look like:
  - a. Jacob responded to God:
    - 1) ...by not only acknowledging His existence and presence, but respecting and revering Him with a healthy fear
    - 2) ...by memorializing the encounter and relationship by setting up a pillar for all to see
    - 3) ...by making a vow, a commitment to God, to worship and serve Him, and give him a tenth of all he owned
  - b. Unfortunately, many today claim to believe in God or have a relationship with him, but their lives don't reflect the things we saw in Jacob:
    - 1) They don't truly respect or fear the LORD because they disregard His Word and disobey His commandments
    - 2) There are no memorials in their lives to identify them as Christians:
      - a) One memorial commanded for Christians is baptism (ex. Denzel Washington)
      - b) Other memorials can be Scripture verses in homes, in the office, Bible themed pictures, Bible's on table or desks, etc.
    - 3) There's no commitment to live for Christ, rather than themselves
  - c. My hope and prayer for us is that our response to God is more like Jacob's