

## GENESIS 28

### Introduction

Jacob's experience at Bethel has a picture and a promise that is shared by New Testament believers:

#### ^ The Picture...

By God's providence Jacob comes to "a certain place," takes "one of the stones of that place" and lays down. The "certain place" was the very place where, in Genesis Thirteen, his grandfather Abraham had set up an altar; the "stones of that place" may have been the very stones of that altar. Jacob, although unaware of these details, was in a sense lying on the altar - presenting himself as a living sacrifice to the Lord! You and I are told to do just this in Romans 12:1,

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service...

Jacob's experience at Bethel is a picture of the believer presenting him or herself as a living sacrifice in their pilgrim journey through this life.

#### ^ The Promise...

Jesus Christ refers to Jacob's experience at Bethel in the Gospel of John. There in Chapter One, talking to Nathanael, He says in verse fifty-one,

John 1:51 "... Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

James Montgomery Boice says that "the idea of additional delightful experiences for those who have believed in Jesus lies at the heart of this verse."<sup>1</sup> In other words, when Jesus says "you shall see heaven open," He is talking to Nathanael and to *you* - to *all* subsequent disciples. Nathanael and every other disciple could somehow experience Jacob's ladder. Jesus Himself is the ladder, the channel of blessing to those who believe. He is describing the spiritual blessings of heaven available to all believers. The promise is that all those who believe on His Name for salvation can expect and can experience the presence, the power, the protection, and the providence of heaven in their walk with Him.

= You and I should be experiencing Bethel! As we present ourselves as living sacrifices we ought to experience all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.

Often that is not the case... Our experience is somewhat different. It is more like that of Esau at Beersheeba rather than that of Jacob at Bethel. Esau was in his father's

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<sup>1</sup>James Montgomery Boice, The Gospel Of John, p. 133.

house, seeking to please his father, but he fell short in his experience of his father's blessings.

Do you ever feel that way? You are in your heavenly Father's house, you are seeking to please him, but you are falling short in your experience of your Father's spiritual blessings. If that is the case you can learn from the experiences of Jacob and Esau how to move from Beersheeba to Bethel.

Jacob reached Bethel; his brother Esau remained at Beersheeba. Jacob presented himself a living sacrifice; his brother Esau prevented himself from becoming a living sacrifice.

#1 You Experience Beersheeba When You  
Prevent Yourself From Becoming A Living Sacrifice

#2 You Experience Bethel When You  
Present Yourself As A Living Sacrifice

#1 You Experience Beersheeba When You  
Prevent Yourself From Becoming A Living Sacrifice

Some of you may object to my using Esau as an example of how believers somehow prevent themselves from entering fully into God's blessings. I understand that Esau was an unbeliever. I also understand that God had chosen Jacob over Esau to inherit the covenant blessings.

But, having said this, it still remains possible to use Esau as an example to exhort Christians. The Bible, in fact, does just this in the Book of Hebrews, in Chapter Twelve. Don't be like Esau! is the Bible's warning to believers who sometimes find, in themselves, the same characteristics that marked his life.

Esau was in his father's house, seeking to please his father, but he fell short of his father's blessing. He saw that it pleased Isaac to send Jacob to Padan Aram to take a wife. He took another wife, but *not* from Padan Aram. He instead went to the

Ishmaelites. The Ishmaelites lived east of Egypt toward Assyria. Esau never made the journey from Beersheeba to Padan Aram that would have taken him through Bethel.

We can identify at least three reasons why Esau prevented himself from coming to Bethel: He was dominated by his flesh, he was indifferent to spiritual pursuits, and he was dull to spiritual truth.

*f* You see him dominated by his flesh in verses 41-45 of Chapter Twenty-seven.

Genesis 27:41 So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob."

Genesis 27:42 And the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said to him, "Surely your brother Esau comforts himself concerning you *by intending* to kill you.

Genesis 27:43 "Now therefore, my son, obey my voice: arise, flee to my brother Laban in Haran.

Genesis 27:44 "And stay with him a few days, until your brother's fury turns away,

Genesis 27:45 "until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereaved also of you both in one day?"

There is a list in Galatians 5:19-21 of the works of the flesh:

Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,

Galatians 5:20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

Galatians 5:21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

From this list, Esau expresses these works of the flesh:

v verse 41 - hatred, envy, jealousy, and murder...

v verse 42 - selfish ambitions (intending to gain the blessing by murder)...

v verse 44 - contentions...

v verse 45 - outbursts of wrath (the word for "anger" describes rapid, angry breathing and the swelling of the nostrils with rage).

v Hebrews 12:16 calls him a "fornicator," probably because of his two Canaanite wives.

Esau was an unbeliever. He continually practiced these behaviors because his heart was unchanged by God's grace.

Believers do not continually practice the works of the flesh, but they do commit sin in these areas. When they are dominated by one or more works of the flesh, they are preventing themselves from coming to Bethel.

*f* You see Esau indifferent to spiritual pursuits in verse 45 of Chapter Twenty-seven.

Genesis 27:45 "until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereaved also of you both in one day?"

Rebekah knew that Esau would soon forget his anger over the stolen blessing. She knew her son well and is telling us that he was not really interested at all in the spiritual aspects of the blessing. He was excited about his lost blessing, but he would quickly get over it. He was indifferent to spiritual pursuits.

Christians can show indifference to spiritual pursuits. The Apostle Paul told Pastor Timothy to "...**stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands**" (2 Timothy 1:6). The Hebrew Christians are exhorted,

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,  
Hebrews 10:25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

These verses tell you that you can become indifferent toward exercising your spiritual gifts, towards loving one another, towards all manner of good works, and towards attending fellowship. Christians often start well, but they end poorly. There is an initial excitement, but that is followed by a waning interest. Such indifference prevents you from experiencing Bethel.

*f* You see Esau dull to spiritual instruction in verses 6-9 of Chapter Twenty-eight.

Genesis 28:6 Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, *and that* as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan,"

Genesis 28:7 and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Padan Aram.

Genesis 28:8 Also Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac.

Genesis 28:9 So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had.

The instruction seems clear enough: Go to Padan Aram and marry a woman from the house of Rebekah's father Bethuel. But Esau instead goes to the Ishmaelites to take a wife. He had the spiritual instruction, but it was dull to him.

Christians are described as "dull of hearing" in Hebrews 5:11. Jesus exhorts Christians in The Book of the Revelation to "hear what the Spirit says to the Churches."

What makes you "dull" to spiritual instruction? The word "dull" as it is used in Hebrews Five indicates it is an acquired condition. It's not that the spiritual instruction itself is dull so much as you *become* dull towards spiritual instruction. This happens

when other interests capture your attention.

Look at Esau for example. While Jacob pursued the spiritual birthright and the spiritual blessing, other interests captured Esau's attention:

v He hunted - whether by occupation or for recreation, it was a captivating interest.

v He married Canaanite women. This tells us that he spent considerable time among the unbelievers. He was captivated with the habits and practices of their culture.

When other interests hold you captive, you grow dull to spiritual instruction and prevent yourself from experiencing Bethel.

= If you are in your Father's house, seeking to please Him, but are falling short in your experience of His spiritual blessings, perhaps one of these are the reason: You are being dominated by your flesh, you have grown indifferent toward spiritual pursuits, or you have acquired a dullness towards spiritual instruction.

f If you are being dominated by some aspect of your flesh, Scripture says in Romans 13:14 to "...put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts." In other words, substitute spiritual habits and starve the flesh.

f If you have grown indifferent toward spiritual pursuits, recommit yourself to excellence in ministering to others.

f If you have grown dull to spiritual instruction, abandon the interests that are competing for your attention.

## #2 You Experience Bethel When You Present Yourself As A Living Sacrifice

Jacob didn't know he was at the site of his grandfather's altar. He was unaware that the stone he used for his pillow may have been from that very altar. But the imagery is clear to us: He was a pilgrim called upon to present himself as a living sacrifice.

Genesis 28:1 Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan.

Genesis 28:2 "Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother.

Parents should take active steps to keep their children away from certain influences...

While you usually do not arrange marriages with specific individuals, you can and should arrange your child's mind to seek individuals with specific qualities...

Genesis 28:3 "May God Almighty bless you, And make you fruitful and multiply you, That you may be an assembly of peoples;

Genesis 28:4 And give you the blessing of Abraham, To you and your descendants with you, That you may inherit the land In which you are a stranger, Which God gave to Abraham."

Genesis 28:5 So Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Padan Aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.

Jacob was to be a patriarch but he went out a pilgrim. Isaac blessed him with plenty, but he went out poor. He blessed him with sovereignty over peoples and land, but he went out to become a servant. The providences seemed to contradict the promises...

As I said, Jacob didn't know that he was presenting himself as a living sacrifice; he didn't know the language of the New Testament. But that is what he was doing. He was leaving father and mother and everything else he had ever known in order to be obedient to the Word of God.

Genesis 28:10 Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran.

Genesis 28:11 So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep.

"A certain place," "that place," "that place..." There *are* significant places in the Bible, places where God chose to reveal Himself to men and to women.

Today we are not so interested in finding particular places for worship. Jesus told the woman of Samaria,

John 4:21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.

John 4:22 "You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

John 4:23 "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

John 4:24 "God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Genesis 28:12 Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder *was* set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

The word for "ladder" is shallum, used only here in all of the Bible. We don't know what is really meant, whether a ladder or a series of steps or a bridge or a stairway...That's probably because, in truth, Jesus Himself *is* the shallum. When talking to Nathanael Jesus said "... you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." The angels would descend *to* Him, true; but they would also descend "upon" Him as if *He* were the stairway! Indeed, Jesus *is* the bridge or stairway that connects earth to heaven.

It pleases God to use His mighty angels to carry out His purposes and providences on earth, and to protect His believers...

Genesis 28:13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I *am* the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.

Genesis 28:14 "Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Genesis 28:15 "Behold, I *am* with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

The pilgrim, presenting himself as a living sacrifice, receives God's blessing. Part of what he receives is unique, only for him; part is shared by us.

^ He is blessed uniquely from us as a Patriarch of the literal nation of Israel...

%o We share in certain aspects of his blessing as God's spiritual children:

v We share in the promise of the presence of God:

Genesis 28:15 "Behold, I *am* with you..."

v We share in the promise of the protection of God:

Genesis 28:15 "...and will keep you wherever you go..."

v We share in the promise of the preservation of God:

Genesis 28:15 "...I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

Genesis 28:16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know *it*."

Genesis 28:17 And he was afraid and said, "How awesome *is* this place! This *is* none other than the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heaven!"

I think you can substitute your name for Jacob's, in this way:

*f* The day you became a Christian, it was like awakening from sleep to the very presence of God; you were filled with godly fear and a sense of how awesome God is.

*f* Today, if you've backslidden, you can awaken to God's presence, submit in godly fear, and renew your sense of how awesome He is.

Genesis 28:18 Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it.

Genesis 28:19 And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously.

Jacob sets up a memorial to his experience. Today we don't want to set up memorials, but we do want to establish reminders. At the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus was revealed in His glory, and Moses and Elijah appeared. Peter, witnessing this, wanted to set up three tabernacles as a memorial. Speaking audibly from heaven, God the Father simply said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" In other words, a memorial was unnecessary; just remember the Word of God. Perhaps that is why Peter frequently tells you in his epistles that he is writing to remind you of the Word of God.

My wife's Bible is filled with reminders. God the Holy Spirit pours His anointing upon a passage, like oil on the stone, and we "mark" it as a reminder of our experience of God's comfort and care.

Genesis 28:20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on,

Genesis 28:21 "so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God.

It is proper to translate the word "if" as "since." Jacob isn't saying "*if* God will be with me..."; he is saying "*since* God will be with me..." The first part of his vow is simply a declaration of what God will graciously do for him: God will protect him, preserve him, provide necessary food and clothing for him, and perform everything according to His divine plan. This is his interpretation and understanding of the ladder.

You can say the same! Your interpretation and understanding of Jesus Christ should always lead you to the same conclusions: By His grace, through no merit of your own, He will protect you, He will preserve you, He will provide necessary food and clothing for you, and He will perform everything according to His divine plan!

Genesis 28:22 "And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."



To remind him of God's grace, Jacob purposed in his heart to practice two spiritual disciplines: He would establish a place of worship, and he would give to the work of God.

We don't hassle people too much about attending worship or about giving to the work of God. It's not that we don't think these are important disciplines; they are. But they must come from the heart, to remind you of God's great grace in your life. They are responses to His blessings in your life - not reasons why you deserve His blessings. There is a certain extent to which exhortations to attend worship and to give to God's work are profitable. The Bible itself exhorts you in both areas and does so frequently. Ultimately your attendance of worship and your giving to God's work are expressions of your understanding of just how much He has blessed you. They reveal what is going on in your heart! They are outward expressions of inward devotion. If you are experiencing the blessings of Bethel, you will express it in worship and in your giving.

#### Conclusion

Bethel means "house of God." In a sense you are *already* at Bethel! Your body is the temple of God; the Church body is the habitation of God the Holy Spirit.

If you feel like you are at Beersheeba, it is by choice. If there are things preventing you from presenting yourself as a living sacrifice to God, deal with them. Leave Beersheeba, where the flesh dominates, where you are indifferent and dull. Return and remain at Bethel - to the place where God's blessings are yours in abundance through Jesus Christ.