

PM Genesis 28 Jacob at Bethel

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[0 : 00] The book of Genesis, Genesis chapter 28, Genesis chapter 28, a second installment in the life of Jacob.

Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him, You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women. Arise, go to Paddan Aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father, and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother.

God Almighty, bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. May he give the blessing of Abram to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham.

Thus Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban, the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.

Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan Aram to take a wife from there, and that as he blessed him, he directed him, You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women.

[1 : 35] And that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan Aram. So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac, his father, Esau went to Ishmael and took as his wife, besides the wives he had, Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, Abram's son, the sister of Nebaioth.

Jacob left Beersheba and went towards Haran. And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night because the sun had set.

Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven.

And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, I am the Lord, the God of Abram your father, and the God of Isaac.

The land in which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east, and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

[3 : 07] 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 promised you.

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, Surely the Lord is in this place. And I did not know it. 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.

So early in the morning, Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil on the top of it.

He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in the way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God.

[4 : 38] And this stone which I have set up for a pillar shall be God's house. And of all that you give me, I will give a full tenth to you.

Amen, and may God bless to us that reading from his word, and to his name be the praise. In your Bibles, to the passage we read, Genesis chapter 28, we shall focus on verses 10 to 22, under the title, Jacob at Bethel.

Jacob at Bethel. The Reverend Douglas Macmillan was a larger than life free church minister, who exercised a very influential ministry in Aberdeen, Glasgow, and Edinburgh.

One day he was greeting his congregation at the close of a morning service, when an American tourist, who happened to be present, spoke to him and said, I must say, I thought your sermon today was rather one-sided.

Douglas was unfazed. He looked at the man and said, Well, come back next week to hear the other side. Some of you may have thought that this morning's sermon was rather one-sided.

[6 : 23] We looked at the early life of Jacob. I highlighted the flaws in the character of Jacob, and indeed the flaws in the character of the immediate members of his family.

Jacob was a very flawed individual. He was a schemer, a manipulator. He was prepared to do whatever it took to get what he wanted.

He took advantage of his older brothers, vulnerability to deprive him of his birthright. And then, with the connivance of their mother, he tricked his father Isaac into giving him the special blessing intended for the older son.

Jacob was a twister. And, we can't get away from that.

All that is true, and it is important to recognize the negative aspects of Jacob's character. Because Jacob's story illustrates how God works with flawed individuals.

[7 : 44] As we noted this morning, what hope would there be for any of us if that were not the case? We're all flawed. We're all sinners by nature and by practice.

But, if God can work with a man like Jacob, he can work with the likes of you and me. The Christian gospel isn't for good people.

It's for bad people who see their need of God's mercy. That's one side of the story.

But, it's not the whole story. God worked on flawed Jacob and began to change him.

He began to mold him into the kind of man he wanted him to be. As a result, Jacob became more aware of God and more dependent on him.

[8 : 50] And, it's still the case that when God forgives our sin and adopts us into his family. He doesn't leave us just as we are. His purpose is to make us more like his son, the Lord Jesus, to change us into his likeness.

The God who refined, flawed Jacob wants all his sons and daughters to develop more of the family likeness.

two preliminary points are perhaps worth making. First, over the course of his life, Jacob became a better man, but he didn't become perfect.

His faith in God grew and he became more godly, but he remained a flawed individual as long as he lived. It's only in heaven that believers are made perfect.

Only in heaven is every last trace of sin removed. The second thing is this, God didn't have mercy on Jacob because he saw his potential.

[10 : 12] He didn't show mercy because he felt he had the potential to become a better person.

No, it was because God had mercy on him that Jacob was enabled to become a better man.

We don't earn God's favour because of what we have achieved or indeed can achieve. Instead, real change is possible only on the basis of God's grace as he enables those whom he has brought into his family to change from the inside out.

I'd like to highlight two things about Jacob from this passage this evening. First of all, at Bethel Jacob gained a new awareness of God and two, at Bethel Jacob made a new commitment to God. Jacob received a new awareness of God and he made a new commitment to God. First of all then, we see how at Bethel Jacob received a new awareness of God.

look at what Jacob says in verse 16. Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it.

[11 : 56] In the following verses he even asks God to be with him and to keep him in the way that he goes. As a result of his experience at Bethel, Jacob has a new awareness of God's presence and protection.

Remember how Jacob ended up in Bethel. It was because his brother Esau hated him and was out to get him.

Jacob was on the run. He was fleeing for his life. He was a marked man. He and his brother had never got on but now things couldn't possibly be worse between them.

And so Jacob was on his way to far away Paddan Aram to seek refuge with his uncle Laban and his family. Jacob had left his own immediate family.

family. The only family he had known to lodge with relatives he had never met.

[13:16] He was on his own and heading out into the unknown. Put yourself in Jacob's shoes for a moment. You're anxious about the mess you've left behind.

You're afraid that the brother you've wronged will come after you. You don't know what things will be like where you're going. You've no one to turn to.

You're all on your own. That's what it was like for Jacob when he came to Bethel. He must have felt very alone as darkness fell in that remote place.

And he lay down to sleep to get some fitful sleep with a stone for his pillow.

But as he slept Jacob had a dream. It was a dream which changed his perspective on himself on God and on his situation.

[14:27] In his dream he saw a ladder stretching a ladder or stairway going between earth and heaven. Angels were going up and down it.

Not only that he saw the Lord and heard him speak. The Lord reminded him that he was the God of his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham.

He then repeated to him the promises he had made to them. Look with me please at verses 13 and 14. I am the Lord the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed here we have promises of a land a multitude of descendants and future blessing for the whole world the promises God had originally made to Jacob's grandfather Abraham God was making the same promises to Jacob making these promises to him at a time when Jacob's links with the land of Canaan couldn't have been more tenuous Jacob was all on his own and yet God was here assuring him that the promises he had made his grandfather and his father were being made to him too the Lord hadn't given up on Jacob he was assuring wily flawed wayward Jacob but he too was part of his great salvation plan and in verse 15 the Lord addresses Jacob's immediate needs look at what he says 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 promised you what comfort there must have been in these words for Jacob he wasn't on his own after all the God of his fathers was with him and was committed to looking after him and one day he was going to bring him back to the land he was having to leave in such a hurry whatever lay ahead Jacob was assured of God's presence and protection the ladder or stairway Jacob saw in his dream went all the way from earth to heaven it highlighted but

[17:59] God was passionately committed to the world he had made he was at work in it through his heavenly agents Jacob needed to know that and so do we God is working out his purposes in our world he is involved in the nitty gritty of life as we know it God is infinitely great he is infinitely majestic but he is committed to this world of time and sense so committed in fact that he sent his one and only son into the world to live as a man and then die a shameful death on a

Roman cross as he bore the punishment which our sins deserved in John's gospel Jesus says to Nathaniel truly truly I say to you you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man Jesus is there alluding to Jacob's dream he's affirming that the ultimate bridge between earth and heaven is himself no wonder C.S.

Lewis referred to earth as the visited planet so much religion in the widest sense of that term is all about people trying to find God but we don't need to go and try to find him even if we could know God has come down to earth to find us that morning when he awoke from his dream Jacob had a new awareness of God he had been reminded that there were open lines of communication between earth and heaven God was present and at work in the world he had made not only that Jacob had been assured he was an integral part of

God's saving plan God was with him and would protect him his reaction in the morning was to say surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it when he arrived in Bethel it must have been literally in his view a God forsaken place but in the morning he had to confess that the Lord was in Bethel and I did not know it lonely isolated nondescript Bethel was now for Jacob none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven God was everywhere even in Bethel and Jacob had the privilege of being caught up in his good purposes that was in many ways a comforting realization but in other ways it was disturbing that's why in verse 17

Jacob we are told was afraid and said how awesome is this place why was Bethel suddenly awesome because even at his most benign God is an awesome God his presence is an awesome

reality when we are truly aware of God's presence we cannot afford to be blasey and if God is everywhere if he is omnipresent as the theologians say just think of what that means it means that he sees what I do he hears what I say he knows what I think he sees what I look at he's aware of the company

[23 : 02] I keep he knows everything about me shouldn't that give us pause for thought at Bethel Jacob received a new awareness of God perhaps that's something we need too if we're Christians we need the assurance that God is with us and that he is committed to working for our good we need him to make himself known to us in a fresh way but there's also a sense in which we need to cultivate his presence these days God doesn't normally communicate to us by means of dreams but he has given us his word and he speaks to us through it we need to take time to read the

Bible and find out what he's saying to us we also need to take time to pray and respond to him in that way as we do so he pours his grace into our hearts and lives and we get to know him better in that way we experience the reality of his presence and are enabled to live in the good of it and if you're not a Christian your greatest need is to know God the good news is that you don't have to go looking for him instead he has come looking for you you need to come in repentance and faith to the Saviour who is the ultimate bridge between earth and heaven there is no other way to God he alone is the way the truth and the life and his promise is that whoever comes to him he will never cast out

God at Bethel Jacob received a new awareness of God and then secondly at Bethel Jacob made a fresh commitment to God Jacob made a fresh commitment to God when he awoke Jacob performed what was essentially an act of worship he made a memorial pillar of the stone he had used as his pillow he anointed it with oil and then made a vow look with me at the words of the vow in verses 20 to 22 then Jacob made 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 clothing to wear so that I come again to my father's house in peace then the Lord shall be my God and this stone which I have set up for a pillar shall be God's house and of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you what is Jacob doing here does something of the old Jacob the old wheeler dealer come through in the words of the vow is Jacob doing a sort of deal with God if you do X for me then I will do Y for you it's certainly the case that the vow is expressed in conditional terms if X then Y the ESV study Bible comments that the conditional nature of Jacob's vow reveals that he is still ambivalent regarding his commitment to the Lord it's certainly true that

Jacob is at an early stage in the life of faith but I personally think that Jacob's vow reflects a stronger degree of commitment to God than that I think it's a heartfelt a sincere response to God's revelation of himself and his purposes the Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner describes the vow as being as thorough a response as Jacob knew how to make he points out how Jacob's immediate response on awaking from his dream is to feel all in the presence of his God he doesn't become immediately preoccupied with the blessings he has been promised no he feels awe before the [28 : 32] God he now knows is present there and Kidner also points out that it was standard practice in the culture of those times to express a vow in conditional terms Jacob makes promises to God in response to God's promises to him if you do X then I will do Y is his way of saying you have promised to do X then I shall do Y some of the conditions which Jacob stipulates are specific but I think they can be extrapolated from the promises God has first made to him there may be some room for disagreement regarding the strength of

Jacob's faith at this point but there is no doubt that this vow represents a new level of commitment on the part of Jacob to the God of his fathers and integral to his vow is the promise that the Lord shall be my God then the Lord shall be my God these are significant words surely at the heart of God's covenant with Abraham was the promise that he would be God to you and to your offspring after you the commitment of God to his people and their answering commitment to him is a theme which is reflected in the

Bible from Genesis literally from Genesis to Revelation in chapter 21 of the book of Revelation we read I heard a loud voice from the throne saying behold the dwelling place of God is with man he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God there can be no greater promise than that God will be our God and there can be no greater commitment on our part than that we undertake the responsibilities of being his people Jacob made a new commitment to the Lord is that something you I need to do too perhaps you're a

Christian but your commitment is not what it once was and it's certainly not what it should be we do nothing to earn our position as members of God's family but now that we are members of his family there are family obligations we need to take on board we are expected to maintain the good name of the family by living in accordance with our heavenly father's standards we are expected to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength we are expected to love our neighbor as ourselves all these things require commitment we don't do them in our own strength far from it we need God's grace and we do them only in response to what God has first done for us we love him because he first loved us but we do need to make every effort to make our calling and election sure and if we have not yet put our faith in the

Lord Jesus then we need to do something about that whoever believes in the son has eternal life whoever does not obey the son shall not see life but the wrath of God remains on him there is hope no matter how flawed we may be no matter how far we may have strayed we are not beyond the reach of God's mercy God reached out to Jacob in his time of need he gave him a new awareness of himself he enabled him to make a new commitment to the God of his fathers yes there was much more for Jacob to learn God had a lot of refining still to do in him but the Lord had begun a good work in him and he was committed to carrying it on to completion

[34 : 06] Jacob was a twister by name and by character but later in life he received a new name he was given the name Israel which means a prince with God the twister became a prince with God Jacob became Israel you see there really were two sides to Jacob story shall we pray