

## Genesis 28:10-17

<sup>10</sup>Jacob set out from Beersheba and traveled toward Haran. <sup>11</sup>He came to a certain place and decided to spend the night there, because the sun had set. He took one of the stones from that place, put it under his head, and lay down to sleep in that place. <sup>12</sup>He had a dream in which he saw a stairway set up on the earth with its top reaching to heaven. There were angels of God ascending and descending on it. <sup>13</sup>There at the top stood the LORD, who said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. The land on which you are lying, I give to you and to your descendants. <sup>14</sup>Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. In you and in your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed. <sup>15</sup>Now, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back again into this land. Indeed, I will not leave you, until I have done what I have promised to you."

<sup>16</sup>Jacob woke up from his sleep, and he said, "Certainly the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." <sup>17</sup>He was afraid and he said, "How awe-inspiring is this place! This is nothing other than the house of God, and this is the gate to heaven."

## Blessed

### I.

There was no KOA near the interstate with all the requisite hookups. He didn't have a motorhome or a truck pulling a 40-foot luxury camper with pop-outs springing out from all sides to extend your living space and your comfort. No gas stove on which to cook. No refrigerator to keep his favorite beverages cold. He had to rough it.

Roughing it didn't mean pulling a tent out of the back of the SUV and getting out a little battery pump to blow up his air mattress, either. There wasn't even any backpacking gear with a little tent and maybe a blow-up pillow. No yard lights to illuminate your way to the bathhouse during the night. In fact, there were no facilities there whatsoever.

What had brought him to this lonely place?

He was on the run. Facing death threats, it seemed the time was ripe to get away from the one threatening him. His mother had arranged for him to go visit some relatives. He could find refuge there.

Not long before his rather hasty departure, events had gotten out of hand. It had always been said that *he* was to be the one who would carry on the family legacy, but his brother didn't see things the same way. It had seemed necessary to take steps to insure that his future was secure.

At first, things had seemed to go according to plan. He posed as his brother to get his nearly blind father to formally give *him* the blessing instead of giving it to his brother. Father Isaac had remained firm that the blessing intended for Esau would stay with Jacob, even though he had been deceived.

His brother was enraged. Esau quickly grew to hate Jacob. Esau decided that as soon as their father died he would kill his brother. Obviously there was a lot of uncertainty in the Jacob's future. He needed to flee for his life. He and his mother, Rebekah, planned a few details and Jacob set off.

He was on his own. Mom couldn't bail him out. Dad wouldn't be any help. Despite a few sketchy plans there were more unknowns than knowns.

"He came to a certain place and decided to spend the night there, because the sun had set. He took one of the stones from that place, put it under his head, and lay down to sleep in that place" (Genesis 28:11, EHV). Out under the stars, Jacob must have felt very, very alone.

Down on his knees in the dirt he rocked a stone back and forth a few times to jiggle it into position so that he would have something to lean on—someplace to elevate his head a bit. He leaned back and maybe folded his arms over his chest.

Did he fall asleep quickly, or were his thoughts racing, like the wispy clouds passing amongst the stars far above his head? Did he wonder, perhaps, what would become of him?

## II.

Perhaps as his head rested on the rock he prayed. I wonder what the content of those prayers might have been. Was he so different from you or me?

“I have made quite the mess of my life, Lord. I’ve been headstrong. I did things my *own* way instead of following your direction. Like my grandfather Abraham, I thought *I* could take the fulfillment of your promises into my own hands. Abraham didn’t do well on *all* his tests when you gave him your promises, my father Isaac sometimes thought *he* could change what you had told him was to be the proper course of action, and *I* fell into the same traps, relying on my own wits instead of your sure promises. Now I find myself in the wilderness, broke and homeless. Help!”

Finally he drifted off into a fitful sleep.

Maybe you are one of those people who sleeps with a little pad of paper and a pen at your bedside in case you wake up from a dream and want to record the details. Legend has it that many authors have done this. Their dreams serve as a catalyst for their imagination to come up with their next big work of fiction.

No pad of paper graces *my* nightstand. Most of the time the second my eyes pop open, the details of my dreams vanish like fog burning off in the morning sunshine. I might stumble around for a minute and get a drink of water and think that I’d like to get back to sleep so I can pick up where I left off, but rarely does that happen. Even rarer is the time that I can remember a couple of fuzzy images.

Jacob’s dream, by contrast, was vivid. “He had a dream in which he saw a stairway set up on the earth with its top reaching to heaven. There were angels of God ascending and descending on it” (Genesis 28:12, EHV).

*That* is quite the dream! Of course, it wasn’t *just* a dream—God was speaking to him in this dream—this vision. Jacob really needed some encouraging. He needed to be strengthened for the tasks that lay ahead. He needed to realize that God was with him and that God had plans for him.

Of course, unlike you and me, Jacob couldn’t whip out his trusty Bible and read the Word of God. He couldn’t hear God’s Word read to him from pulpit and lectern. There were no endless sets of commentaries to help dissect and understand what God said. There was no Bible. Not even part of it; not even a *little* part. The only place to turn for answers to his prayers was the aural history passed on to him by his father Isaac and his mother Rebekah.

God used a vivid dream to give Jacob the reassurance he needed.

## III.

“There at the top stood the LORD, who said, ‘I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. The land on which you are lying, I give to you and to your descendants. <sup>14</sup>Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. In you and in your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed’” (Genesis 28:13-14, EHV).

God still loved him! He had failed to trust God’s promise that *he* would be the ancestor of the Savior and all the promises that went along with that. He had lied and cheated and

deceived. Just like any of us, when he looked carefully at his life the number of his sins and the severity of his sins mounted up. Those lies weren't just sins against his father and his brother, they were sins against God. The deceptive actions he took were directed not just at his family, but at God. He had acted as though God couldn't do it without Jacob's help. God needed just a little prod from Jacob to see that the time was now to make everything happen.

That, in effect, was what he had done. Again, he sounds like a *lot* of people I know. Maybe even like *you*.

Yes, God loved him, despite the way he had twisted God's promises and sought to make them fit the mold of his own understanding. Though he deserved to be cast out of God's presence forevermore, God promised that wouldn't happen. Better than he deserved—that's what God was promising him. God would be with him. He would have descendants. The land on which he now traveled as a vagabond would one day belong to him and his family. Most important of all, the promise of the Savior to come who would pay for all his sins of lying and cheating and stealing was still in effect.

"Now, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back again into this land. Indeed, I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised to you" (Genesis 28:15, EHV). He wouldn't need a notepad and a pen to remember *this*. No matter how alone he might feel, God presented him with the facts. "I am with you and will watch over you." Never would God leave him or forsake him.

#### IV.

"Jacob woke up from his sleep, and he said, 'Certainly the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.' <sup>17</sup>He was afraid and he said, 'How awe-inspiring is this place! This is nothing other than the house of God, and this is the gate to heaven'" (Genesis 28:16-17, EHV). At the word "afraid" in your EHV Bible there is a footnote which says: "or *he was filled with awe*." Both work, don't they? God doesn't choose to speak directly to very many people. There is some fear when he does, because God is completely righteous and holy. It is only natural to tremble at his presence. Filled with awe is the other side of that coin. While trembling in fear, you would be filled with awe that God chose to speak to *you*, sinful human being though you are.

This was such a vivid experience that Jacob wouldn't need a notepad and pen to write it down; he would remember this for all the days of his life.

On the other hand, maybe it wouldn't hurt to have this written down. Long after Jacob, these words were written down for you because God's promises and God's forgiveness still apply. "Now, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back again into this land. Indeed, I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised to you" (Genesis 28:15, EHV). As he promised Jacob, God promises to always be with you and watch over you. Not everything that happened to Jacob for the rest of his life was good, but God blessed him through and in spite of the difficult times. Scripture tells us that God promises *all* his believers that he will work in everything for our good. The Bible teaches that God will never leave us or forsake us.

Visions are rare. Jacob had a wonderful vision in which God told him again that a Savior was coming. You don't need such a vision. While Jacob could only *hear* about the promise *you* have the completed history of God's saving activity in which he has recorded for you the fulfillment of all those promises in Jesus.

God's greatest promise for you is Jesus. Be confident that he will keep *every* promise he has made to you. He will never leave you or forsake you. You are blessed. Amen.