

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 25

Chapter 28:6 - 22

It was the 2,222nd year since the creation of Adam when Rebekah and Isaac instructed Jacob to leave their home and go to Haran to find a wife, create a family, hire servants and obtain flocks for his livelihood. The Scripture does not indicate that Isaac funded Jacob in any way as he sent him out on his own. Evidently, because of his act of deception, Jacob would have to gather his own resources and provide for his own needs from that day on. Did Jacob own the birthright he purchased from Esau? Yes. Did Isaac give it to him as he left Haran? No. If Jacob had acquired the inheritance, he would have taken the family with him and become responsible for the family's welfare but that did not happen with Jacob. Furthermore, Isaac still had to provide for himself and his family for 49 more years although, at the time, he thought that he was about to die.

By then Isaac was 131 years old, blind and feeble. With Jacob's departure, who would look after the business of Isaac's family? Even though Jacob had purchased Esau's birthright and stolen his blessing, we can assume that Esau stayed with the family when Jacob left and looked after Isaac's clan.

Esau and Mahalath

Genesis 28:6 Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram, to take to himself a wife from there, *and that* when he blessed him he charged him, saying, " You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," ⁷ and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Paddan-aram. ⁸ So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father Isaac; ⁹ and Esau went to Ishmael, and married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth.

Word travels quickly in a family and evidently Esau did not dally while making his decision. Once he heard of his parent's instruction to Jacob, he quickly decided to go to his uncle's family and marry his daughter, Mahalath. With this information, we can add a daughter's name to the descendants of Ishmael. We do not know how many daughters Ishmael had nor do we know the number of his wives; nevertheless, Esau married a daughter of Ishmael, presumably to try to soothe the despair of his father and mother. Mahalath was part Semite and part Egyptian. Whether or not it satisfied his parents yearning, we do not know.

Ishmael	Nebaioth
	Mahalath
	Kedar
	Adbeel
	Mibsam
	Mishma
	Dumah
	Massah
	Hadad
	Tema
	Jetur
	Naphish
	Kedemah

Beersheba to Haran

Genesis 28:10 Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran.

Finally, we know exactly where Isaac's family was living at the time. They were still in Beersheba where they had moved before the birth of Jacob and Esau which means that Isaac lived in the area of Beersheba when he was a child, moved back to Hebron where his mother died and then returned to Beersheba after the death of his father, Abraham. Jacob and Esau were about 15 years old when Abraham died which meant that they had lived in Beersheba with their parents for at least 56 years.

It is 660 miles from Beersheba to Haran. Traveling an average of 20 miles per day, it took Jacob at least 33 days to make the journey.

Covenant with Jacob

Genesis 28:11 And he came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. 12 And he had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. 14 "Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 "And 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."

About 66 miles out of Beersheba, or three days journey, Jacob stopped for the night after the sun had set. In verse 19 we will discover that Jacob had spent the night outside the city of Luz. Why did Jacob not enter the city and find a place for the night? Because he had arrived after the setting of the sun, the gates were closed and locked! We know about this city. It was the second place where Abraham worshiped the LORD when he first entered Canaan Land at the age of 75. It was where Abraham decided to go to Egypt because of the famine instead of staying there and relying on the LORD to provide for his needs. It was where Abraham returned when he left Egypt and worshiped the LORD again. It was where the LORD patiently waited for Abraham to return from his foray in Egypt. When Moses recorded that story in Genesis 11, he identified the place as Bethel although its name until this event in the life of Jacob was Luz.

What was the purpose of the ladder's reaching from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending upon it? Many have tried to interpret the scene, but we really do not know its purpose. Although we do not know the purpose, we do know the message. Here, the LORD delivered the promise of the covenant He made with Abraham and Isaac to Jacob. Picture this!

Jacob was 71 years old, a scoundrel who had tripped his brother by the heel twice, bought Esau's birthright and stolen his blessing. Now, in this story, he has been exiled from his home by his father to make it on his own 660 miles away from all that he knew and loved. Possibly, for the first time in Jacob's life, things looked bleak and he possibly believed that provisions would not come as easily as they had in his father's house. Isaac's blessing promised him a relatively easy journey. Here, the LORD's covenant with Jacob promised to enact in his life the blessing of Isaac and the LORD's protection on his journey to Haran and back. We must notice how the LORD has narrowed the covenant through Abraham's descendants. The coming descendant Who would bless all the inhabitants of the world was not from the lines of Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and Esau combined, but from Abraham to Isaac and now through Jacob.

Naming of Bethel

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

¹⁸ So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on its top. ¹⁹ And he called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz.

When Jacob awoke, he knew that he had had an encounter with the LORD God Almighty. Surely he knew about such events. His father and grandfather as well as every ancestor back to Adam had spoken directly with the LORD. Here, possibly for the first time, Jacob had specifically heard from the LORD. All who trust and believe in the LORD have had an encounter with Him and the physical place of that meeting often becomes a special place in their memories until they join the LORD. Long after the church pew had been removed and replaced with chairs or the building razed and replaced with a new structure or a move was made to another part of the world, those places remained special to the hearts of each individual. Jacob would not forget this place for he would return to it many times about two decades later. To him it was the place where he met the LORD at His "gate of heaven." Jacob, at age 71, was finally on the right path for his life. When he awoke, he took the stone pillow and made it an altar for worship and named the place "the house of God" which is the word Bethel in Hebrew. The LORD had invested in the life of Jacob and He would not stop until all that He had in store for Jacob was complete!

Jacob's Vow of a Tenth

Genesis 28:20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, " 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, ²¹ **and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God.**

²² "And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house; and of all that Thou dost give me I will surely give a tenth to Thee."

Worship of the LORD should always include a promise and a gift to Him. Jacob had not made just a promise to the LORD, he had made a vow. A vow binds a person to a specific task that

must be completed in a specific way and for a specific purpose. A promise could be fulfilled in various ways at various times. The two are similar; yet, the vow is extremely specific and restrictive. If the LORD would truly take care of Jacob until he returned to Bethel, he would make the LORD his God. How foolish! He was already Jacob's God! Can the patience of the LORD be seen in this passage? The LORD had made a great covenant with this man and foolish Jacob wanted to wait to see if the LORD would do His part first.

However, Jacob made a costly promise in his vow. Notice Jacob that said, "**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, then ... I will surely give a tenth to Thee.**" Jacob had nothing to give to the LORD on the morning as he awoke from the dream. No lamb or goat to offer. No sacrifice to make! Just a little olive oil to pour on a stone. What kind of offering is that for such a grand and marvelous promise from a grand and glorious LORD of heaven? If the LORD did His part, Jacob would give a tenth of all to the LORD when he returned to Bethel!

And so it should be with everyone who has an encounter with the LORD. Dare we say that everyone has had such an encounter at the point of a deep desperation in life? It happened when we were at the point of greatest need for a Savior, a LORD, a God. We needed someone to help us with our struggle. We needed an answer to a problem we were experiencing. We needed a guide to direct our path. We needed a physician to heal our wounds. We needed an attorney to defend our case. We needed a judge to set aside our guilt. We needed a prophet to tell us God's Word, a minister to pray, a friend closer than a brother, a helper to hold our hand, a cook to provide sustenance, a servant to clean us when we were unable to clean ourselves. One Person perfectly answers all those needs. At this point in the story, He is called the LORD; in about 1,800 more years, His name will be Jesus. He will be born in a cattle stall in the city of Bethlehem, visited by angels, kings, shepherds and livestock. He will be registered in a census required by Caesar and a tax will be paid on His behalf. This Holy Child will descend from the lineage of Jacob and be the culmination of the Covenant placed upon this man in this encounter in this place called Bethel, the house of God, at the gates of heaven.