

**Text: Genesis 28:10-22**

**Title: Jacob's Dream**

**Theme: God graciously meets with Jacob in a vision to assure him of His covenantal faithfulness.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Many people outside of the Reformed circle think that they are the ones who decide if they want to be saved. Some think that God makes salvation possible as a gift, and they are the ones who choose to accept it. Others think that it is true that God has chosen them, but their choice to accept is equally important, in that way they may argue that they have contributed to their salvation. But you and I know better. We know that our salvation is first and foremost about what God has done, and we only respond to what He has done. We know that without the gracious election of God and the Holy Spirit who works in our hearts, you and I would never move to exercise faith. This wonderful truth is clearly taught in the Bible, and there is no clearer passage than what is in front of us today.

This is a lesson that Jacob needed to learn as well. Some of you may remember who Jacob was, Isaac's younger son. He was a cheater and a deceiver, a man who used to get what he wanted by his own schemes, his very own name suggested that: to trip up or to overthrow. But we see that God was even gracious to a sinner, a cheater, a deceiver like Jacob. It is because the Lord was going to teach Jacob the proper way of relating to God was not based on any scheme of man but based on God's electing grace and mercy. It is only when Jacob dwells in this truth, will he truly find true assurance and confidence.

Today, we will consider the text in three parts:

### **Jacob ran from his troubles**

### **God revealed his promises to Jacob**

### **Jacob's response to God's Revelation**

#### **I. Jacob ran from his troubles**

Let us first consider the context.

In the opening of our text, we read that Jacob was running out of Beersheba and going toward Haran. Why was Jacob running away to Haran? It is because in chapter 27, it is recorded that Jacob stole Esau's blessing as the first-born son, and Esau hated Jacob and swore to kill him. So, Rebekah told Jacob to go to Haran to escape from Esau, and she said that she would send someone to get him when Esau's fury turned away. Jacob was therefore running for his life. He was running from his furious brother!

#### **a. Jacob's journey**

This is where our text begins, Jacob was on his way to Haran from Beersheba. It was probably an uneasy journey for Jacob because he probably did not bring too much with him as he left in a hurry, and Bethel was around 40 miles from Beersheba. You know, travelling back then was not like our road trips these days when we have sports cars and smooth roads. It was harsh, because he was probably on foot, and he did not have a tent in which he might stay. Jacob was alone out in the cold, and he was tired having walked 40 miles. More than that, he also had to worry if Esau might have brought men out for the pursuit or sent murderers for him. In other words, Jacob was in a desolate condition. There was no hotel for him to stay. There was no army surrounding him. He simply found a stone out in the wild to lay his head when night came.

Maybe it would be different if Jacob had stayed to deal with his sins, but we see that he was running from his troubles. Esau was sinful when he despised his own birth right and sold it for a bowl of stew, but Jacob was even worse of a man. Though it was long ago prophesied that "the older shall serve the younger" when Jacob was in the womb of Rebekah, yet, that did not justify Jacob for taking advantage of his brother's weakness and made him swear to sell him the birth right. That also did not justify his deceiving his father and stole the blessing from his brother. Jacob was a deceiver and a cunning man. Now we see here that Jacob was in a sad and sorrowful condition into which he had brought himself.

#### **b. Jacob's dream**

But we see here that though Jacob was alone, yet he was not, because his Heavenly Father was with him. During his sleep, the Lord gave Jacob a vision. Jacob saw "a ladder was set up in the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it."

This dream was an encouragement to Jacob. How? How was this an encouragement? Well, it was a reminder that God was the commander of both heaven and earth. He carried out his commands by commanding His angels. It was also a reminder that he was not alone, but the Lord was with him. The Lord was both his guide and his guard. Though he was weary and anxious from wandering from his father's house, yet still he was under the good care and protection of God, who had sent his angels to guard his going out and coming in. How sweet was this encouragement to Jacob?! He was in despair, he was running for his life, all confused and weary. Not only did God provide for him a stone on which Jacob might lay his head, God also gave him an encouragement through a vision in order that he might carry on in his journey.

Lessons:

1. **We see God's wonderful and mysterious election!** Both Esau and Jacob were bad, but one chosen, the other was not. We see the mysteriousness of God's election! Your election was not based upon any foreseen merit or based upon any condition, but simply out of God's free grace. Don't be proud therefore, give thanks and rejoice in the Gospel of grace and also pray that the Lord may bring more people into this grace in which we stand through Christ. God has elected you to speak His truth!
2. **There are times when you feel that you are left alone, but you are not.** Brothers and sisters, have you ever experienced times when you felt that you were left alone, either because of your sins or shortcomings? Let us be reminded that though we may feel left alone and helpless, the Lord is ever so close to us. He sent his angels to be with you. He is always ready to help you, Psalm 91:11, "For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways." The Lord may put His children in pain, but He never leaves them alone.
3. **The ladder that stood between the heaven and the earth was pointing forward to the mediation of Christ.** Since the Fall, the only way of a relationship with God was through our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other way of getting to heaven, but by this ladder, which is Christ. Earlier in Genesis we see the tower of babel, it was man's way to try to reach up to heaven. But God's way was by sending his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ! Jesus is the mediator between God and man. Jesus Christ is the way; all God's favors come to us, and all our services go to him, by Christ.

## II. God revealed his promises to Jacob

The Lord did not only encourage Jacob through a dream, He also encouraged Jacob through His covenant promises. He said to Jacob, "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." '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. "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.**"

We see that God is ever so faithful to His promise! For the promise he made to Jacob was the same promise made to Abraham and to Isaac. In chapter 15, the Lord made a covenant with Abraham and promised him with the same words; then in chapter 26, the Lord promised Isaac with the same covenant of promise; and here, in chapter 28, we see that Jacob had received the same covenant of promise from the God of his fathers. Let us now look specifically at the promise.

### a. The promise of a land (prosperity)

First of all, the Lord promised him, "the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants." This was the promise of the Land of Milk and Honey, the Land of Canaan in which the twelve tribes of Israel dwelled. If we read on, we see that Jacob remembered this promise even in his old age, because in Genesis 49, he ordered his descendants to not bury him in Egypt but bring his bones back to the land when they inherit it.

### b. The promise of descendants (posterity)

The Lord has also promised him that his posterity should multiply exceedingly as the dust of the earth. If you put yourself in Jacob's shoes, all alone in the desert and your life at stake. It seemed that he had become a pilgrim, away from his father's house, plucked off as a withered branch, yet, he should become a flourishing tree, and his descendants would be like the stars in the sky! What a wonderful promise! What an encouragement to a man who felt like he was cut off from his father's house. What seemed hopeless would become hopeful because of the faithfulness of God, and he would not go to sleep until he saw multiple sons at his right hand.

### c. The promise of the Seed

The final thing that the Lord promised him was the most important of all: propensity through Christ. He said, "in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed". This was also promised to Abraham and to Isaac, it was the promise that all the blessings of the land and the descendants would be given through the Seed, through an offspring. It was an indication that all would be blessed because of the very offspring that would come from his loins! It was none other than the Messiah, in whom all the nations would be blessed. But who was that seed by which the earth would be blessed? Paul tells us the answer in Galatians 3:16, "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ." Jesus was the One who was being prophesied here! Jesus is the great blessing of the world. This was Jacob's greatest comfort in the midst of despair! He received the covenant of promise! The Lord did not only just promise him the land and the numerous of descendants, but also promised him the Messiah: the One whom He saw in the dream who stood above the ladder! The only mediator between God and man! The means by which God reconcile the relationship between Him and His people!

More than that, the Lord also promised to never leave him nor forsake him. These are encouraging words to Jacob. He was in this unknown place, without knowing what would happen to him next. But by God's good providence, the Lord brought him into this place at which there was a stone for him to lay his head and spoke comfortably to him. That was Jacob's greatest consolation in the midst of despair! This is God's grace toward a sinner like Jacob.

Lessons:

1. **If you are a Christian, you can be assured that the Lord is with you wherever you go.** I mentioned earlier that the Lord guards you and keeps you by His angels, and that is true! He will keep you and guard you because you are a child of promise by

faith! What a blessing! We can be sure of our election and our salvation, because we know that He who had bought us by His blood, who loved us and willingly died in our stead will never leave us nor forsake us! That is our security!

2. **When immediate circumstances seem to stand contrary, we must still hope and trust in the Lord!** Brothers and sisters, we see here that Jacob was in the midst of despair, he was like a withered branch who was cut off. Jacob did not know what would happen, and the Lord brought sweet words to him. But even then, he still did not know the tough path in front of him, for he who was a deceiver would later be deceived by his uncle Laban. He would have to work years to marry Rachel. Yes, he did come back to this place. It would be a long time until God brought him back to this very place, Bethel. When we see that providences seemed to contradict the promises, we must still trust and hope in the Lord, we must rely on his grace and goodness in our daily walk.
3. **You are also Abraham's seed!** Brothers and sisters, we see that here Jacob was promised the blessing because of the Seed that would come through his loins, and that Seed was the Lord Jesus Christ! The truth is that we by faith also receive the same promise! Paul says in Galatians 3:7-9, "Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham." <sup>8</sup> And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, *saying*, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." <sup>9</sup> So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham." Salvation had also been offered to us! If we believe in Christ, we can rightly say that we are children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! We are not their children by blood, but by faith in Christ!

### III. Jacob's response to God's Revelation

#### a. Jacob responded with fear

After Jacob had heard the words of promise the Lord promised him, Jacob recognized that it was God's revelation to him and he responded, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." It was not only a sweet dream that Jacob had, that made him feel better, but it was God's revelation to him! He revealed His presence with Jacob and promised him with what Jacob never deserved.

This immediately struck fear in Jacob. He understood that for his whole life he used to get things by his own schemes, but this time, it was not, it was God who came to him and graciously revealed to him His promises. There was no ground for Jacob to be puffed up and feel good about himself because he was promised such wonderful things, but he responded with fear and trembling, for the holiness and the mercy of God had struck him low.

Furthermore, Jacob also responded with wonder as he recognized the awesomeness of this ordinary place. It was probably in the middle of nowhere, a place with a few stones, may be a few trees, nothing extraordinary to the ordinary eyes. But Jacob saw this place with the eyes of faith, because it was where the Lord had revealed himself to him, it was the place at which the ladder between the heaven and the earth was placed, which signified the reconciliation between God and man was here.

#### b. Jacob responded with a vow

Then we see Jacob not only responded with fear and awe, but with action. Early in the morning when Jacob woke up, he responded by setting up a pillar with the stone that he used as the pillow. It was done so probably because he wanted to be reminded of this place, which seemed to be ordinary to the eyes of others, but extraordinary to him. The pillar was set up as a mark so that he might come back in the future and forever be reminded of the lasting monument of God's favor to him. He therefore poured oil on the top of the stone, which probably was the ceremony back then when people set up and dedicated their altars. And if we read on, we do see that Jacob later did return to this very place and built the altar, in gratitude to God for this vision. He also renamed the place, calling it Bethel, which means the house of God, because it was at this very place, the Lord revealed Himself to Jacob.

Finally, Jacob also responded with a vow. He gave glory to God. It was his act of worship! We see here the faith of Jacob. This was the turning moment of his life! He who was a deceiver and a cunning cheater was given the gift of faith! God first said to him, "I am with you, and will keep you". Then Jacob responded in faith, saying, "Seeing God is with me and will keep me, as he promised, who will also provide all that I need, and will bring me back to my father's house in peace. I rest my hope in it! I depend upon it!"

More than that, Jacob also vowed to give a tenth of everything as offering, out of gratitude for what God had done. For Jacob knew that God deserved all, and he gave back to the Lord out of gratitude and in faith, out of sincerity. What a response! Having seen what the Lord had promised, Jacob responded in faith by vowing that he would love God back and would walk closely with Him! That is true Christian response, brothers and sisters! What faith!

Lessons:

1. **We must respond with worship and praises after we have received grants of mercy.** We should be like Jacob, we must recognize our lowliness in contrast to the grace of God, and fear him, we must respond with worship and with praise. One commentator wrote, "Where God meets us with his special presence we ought to meet him with the most humble reverence, remembering his justice and holiness, and our own meanness and vileness."
2. **The grace of God calls for a return of duty.** We see that Jacob vowed to give a tenth, it was out of sincerity and out of gratitude for what God had given him that he willfully vowed to give back to God. Our tithing likewise should be an act of worship, out of gratitude that we give what the Lord had given us, a new life and a purposeful life!
3. Brothers and sisters, we are putting our faith in the same Christ with Jacob, he saw the Messiah from far and was saved, and we now looked back at the Cross and receive what is promised to us! This is the beauty of the Gospel, all of us were justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ! The Lord has graciously saved you while you were in your sins and unbelief, not because of

anything wrought in you, but simply out of his good pleasure. How should you respond? Let us not boast in ourselves but let us with fear and reverence respond by telling others this good news!

### **CONCLUSION**

We see here in this passage that Jacob lived his life as a deceitful man, a cunning cheater. But the Lord was gracious to him even though he did not deserve it, and He even gave Jacob the same promise he gave to Abraham and Isaac! We see the unfathomable grace and goodness of our God! Salvation is a gift. Without the electing grace of God and the Holy Spirit who works in our hearts, you and I would still be dead in our sins.

Brothers and sisters, do you remember when the Lord called you to faith? Do you remember when you were hopeless in your sins and your heart yearned for help, and when there was none? God came to you and gave you not only a new life but also made you co-heir with Christ? Let us therefore, rejoice in your election! Rejoice in how the Lord had brought us from darkness into His marvelous light! Let us also work out our salvation with fear and trembling, bring glory and praises to God!

Finally, Jacob heard God's promise of the Seed and he said, "how sweet is this place!" Jacob saw it from far and rejoiced! The truth is that not every place is sweet, that place was sweet only because Jacob saw the coming of Christ, the only Mediator between God and man! But if you are not a Christian, it is not very sweet for you because God is against you because of your sin, but if you look to Him today, and turn from your wicked ways, he is full of mercy and he shall have compassion on you. Come now, come to Jesus, and rejoice in the place in which the Lord Jesus dwells!

Let us pray.