

Exegetical Notes – Genesis 28:10-22

“Jacob’s Dream”

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(Genesis answers three basic theological questions. The first question is, “Whose world is it anyway?” The text answers the question by affirming that it is God’s world by right of creation. It is God’s world because God made it. The second question Genesis asks is “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way?” The answer is by trusting God and obeying Him. Family becomes the concern and Genesis begins to answer the third question, “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way particularly with the members of our own family?” In Genesis 25, we visited the family of Abraham, and we have seen how Abraham’s family was fractured because Abraham did not trust God completely and did not follow the plan of God for marriage. We saw how the family of Isaac, Abraham’s heir, was divided by parental favoritism. So far, we have not seen a family that remained healthy and intact. The text continues by showing what happened in Isaac’s family.)

Genesis 28:10-22

Verse 10

¹⁰ Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran.

- (See Genesis 25:19 – 28:9 and the exegetical notes prepared on those passages.) Jacob, Isaac’s second-born son, had stolen the birthright blessing from his older brother, Esau. With the help of his mother, Rebekah, Jacob had deceived his father. Esau had vowed to kill Jacob. So Jacob was fleeing from his father’s house hoping to find peace in the household of his uncle, his mother’s brother, Laban.
- Esau had married two women who were not Hebrew. These women troubled Isaac and Rebekah because they had brought pagan practices (probably idol worship) into Isaac’s household. So, as he left Isaac, Isaac had told Jacob to find a wife from among Laban’s daughters.
- Isaac’s family was divided and broken because Isaac had not learned the answer to the second question which Genesis answers, “How do we get

along in God's world God's way". He did not trust God and obey God. But God was faithful to His promise to Abraham (see Genesis 12:2-3).

Verses 11-15

¹¹ When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. ¹² He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. ¹⁴ Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. ¹⁵ I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

- On his journey to the place where Laban lived, Jacob had a dream. In the dream, he saw a great staircase that ascended from earth into heaven. Angels were descending to earth and ascending from earth on the staircase.
- At the top of the staircase stood Elohim, the Lord God, the God of Abraham and of Isaac. The divine name, "YHWH," is not used here.
- In the dream, from the top of the staircase, God declares His faithfulness to Jacob. God renews the promise He gave to Abraham to Jacob. God promises to bless Jacob and his children and all the people of the earth through them, to watch over Jacob, to bring Jacob back home, and to never leave Jacob. Even though Jacob is unworthy of God's favor and has failed to trust God and has not obeyed God, God will be faithful. Jacob has not earned God's favor. But God's favor is extended to him as an act of God's grace. God is forever faithful to His word.

Verses 16-19

¹⁶ When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." ¹⁷ He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. ¹⁹ He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

- When Jacob awoke, he remembered the dream. He understood that God had visited him.
- Jacob used the stone that he had used as a pillow to build a monument to God and he named the place “Bethel.” The Hebrew word means “house of God.”

Verses 20-22

²⁰ *Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear ²¹ so that I return safely to my father’s household, then the Lord will be my God ²² and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.”*

- Jacob then made a vow to God. He promised that if God was faithful to him and did as He promised to do, that he, Jacob, would make the God of Abraham and Isaac his God, too. He would remember the place where he had this dream as God’s place, and he would give God a tenth of all God gave to him.
- Jacob does not yet know God’s nature. He does not fully acknowledge that he knows whose world he lives in or how to get along in God’s world God’s way. IF God is faithful? God is always faithful. But Jacob still thinks that he is in control.

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