

# GENESIS

## Chapter 28

*Jacob Sent to Laban*

**Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him, “You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women. 2 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. 3 God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. 4 May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham!” 5 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.**

**28:1-5** The household of Isaac was in turmoil. Mother and son had teamed up to deceive the aged father, and the older son hated his twin brother enough to kill him. At this point God once again intervened. He overruled the petty plans of people, so that His good purpose was served. (PBC)

**28:1** *blessed him* – This is distinct from 27:28-29. This is a blessing of Abraham (v. 4). (TLSB)

If Isaac had been bitter at having been betrayed by his own son, we could perhaps have understood. But his words show he humbly accepted the way things had turned out and was reconciled to the son who had received him. When he spoke to Jacob, there was no bitterness in his words, and no criticism. (PBC)

When Isaac had previously announced the promises to Jacob, he did so unwillingly, thinking he was addressing Esau. Now of his own volition Isaac blessed Jacob. He knowingly and willingly granted the full Messianic blessing to the son who had not been his choice, but God's. “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob,” the apostle tells us (Heb. 11:20). (PBC)

*you must not take a wife from the Canaanite women* – This could possibly be referring to Hittites, like the wives of Esau, who became acclimated to Canaanite culture. Or, it may refer more generally to Canaanites. (TLSB)

**28:2** *Paddan Aram*. Means “plain of Aram,” another name for Aram Naharaim. (CSB)

Rebekah had wanted Jacob to leave Canaan and to go to her relatives for a short time, until things at home had settled down. God overruled Rebekah's plan in favor of His own. Jacob didn't return home until twenty years later. He left as Jacob, “the heel-grabber,” the one who was determined to get ahead of the other person, even if that meant taking unfair advantage of him. He returned twenty years later as Israel, “the man who struggled with God and overcame.” (PBC)

Part of God's training program for Jacob was to help him, first of all, to put down his sinful nature, his inclination to deceive, to seek his own advantage at the expense of others. Got let Jacob experience the results of the treachery he had perpetrated on his father. Jacob had to learn the hard way. He, the homebody, had to leave his home. Being forced to run for your life – and with a guilty conscience, at that – is not an easy way to leave one's childhood home and family. “The way of transgressors is hard,” God has told us (Prov. 13:15, KJV). God had to check those sinful impulses, to help Jacob drown his old sinful nature. If unchecked, they could only hamper his spiritual growth as God's child and heir of the promise. (PBC)

But another part of God's training program for Jacob was to teach him he could trust God's promises. Instead of informing Jacob that his dishonesty disqualified him from being the heir of the Messianic promises, God let him hear those promises again – first from the lips of his aged father, and then directly from the lips of God. (PBC)

*Take a wife for yourself there.* See 24:3–4. (CSB)

**28:3** *make you fruitful* – The covenant promise includes many descendants. This promise leads ultimately to Christ, Jacob's greatest descendant. (TLSB)

Through one great Descendant Jacob would actually “become a community of peoples.” In Christ all nations would share in the blessings originally promised to Abraham and now transmitted to Jacob. Surely this promise of God to an underserving sinner strengthened the new life of faith struggling to survive and to grow within the heart of Jacob. (PBC)

**28:4** *blessing of Abraham.* For Paul's application of this phrase to Christian believers see Gal 3:14. (CSB)

This blessing to Jacob passes on the promises that Yahweh made to Abraham (Gn. 12:7; 13:15, 17; 15:18; 17:1-2, 6, 16; 22:17). (TLSB)

**28:5** And so Jacob set out on the 500-mile journey to the city of Haran, in the country north of Canaan. Today this land is known as Syria; in the OT times it was called Aram, home of the Aramean people and of the Aramaic language. As he left, Jacob could hardly have been proud of the fact that through deception he had managed to get the promise he wanted. He was frightened, haunted by the memory of his guilt, but cheered by the promise his father had just repeated to him. (PBC)

**28:1–5** Isaac gives Jacob a command and a blessing: Jacob must leave home, go to his relatives, and not marry a Canaanite wife. Before he departs, Isaac gives Jacob the blessing of Abraham, a blessing that includes the land of Canaan, many descendants, and ultimately the dignity of being an ancestor of the Messiah. Parents today should carefully raise their children to seek a godly, Christian spouse, and children should honor and obey their parents according to God's Word. This is God's command. But He also has a blessing for us. In Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham comes to all nations, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith (Gal 3:14). • Heavenly Father, keep us in Your Son, Jesus, that we may retain the Holy Spirit to the end of our days. Amen. (TLSB)

*Esau Marries an Ishmaelite*

**6** 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,” **7** and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan-aram. **8** So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac his father, **9** Esau went to Ishmael and took as his wife, besides the wives he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth.

**28:6** *blessed...sent him* – How hard this experience must have been for Esau. It seems normal that all close male relatives would attend the final blessing of a dying man. However, Isaac recovered and died later (35:29). (TLSB)

**28:9** *in besides the wives he had.* Before continuing the narrative of Jacob's journey to his relatives in Aram, Moses inserts a note about Esau which once again illustrates his spiritual dullness. Apparently he

hadn't realized how unacceptable his two Canaanite wives were to his parents. Now he learned that Jacob had been sent to his mother's relatives to find a proper wife. In a belated attempt to win his father's good will, Esau took a third wife, a daughter of Ishmael, from the branch of Abraham's family which was not only outside the promise but actually hostile to it. Esau's action helps us to understand better why God did not use Esau in His plan. (PBC)

**28:6–9** Esau chooses a wife from Abraham's family (Ishmael) in order to please Isaac, which may indicate repentance for previously dishonoring his parents. In opposition to the Fourth Commandment, we have often disrespected our parents and others in authority. God's Law condemns our disobedience and calls us to sincere repentance. We are also recipients of His blessing in Christ. • We praise You, O Lord Jesus, that You paid for all our sins with Your bitter suffering and death. Grant us sound marriages and sincere repentance. Amen. (TLSB)

### *Jacob's Dream*

**10** Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. **11** 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. **12** And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder[b] 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! **13** And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "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. **14** 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. **15** 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." **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 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. **19** He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. **20** 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, **21** so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, **22** 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."

**28:11** *a certain place...sun had set* – Jacob had now been on the road for several days. He had traveled about 70 miles, and as the sun set he was bone-weary and lonely. (PBC)

*one of the stones ... under his head.* In ancient times headrests (e.g., in Egypt) were often quite hard, sometimes being made of metal. People were used to sleeping on the ground. (CSB)

**28:12** *behold* – God had a special treat in store for that young man that night, and the Hebrew text calls attention to it in a striking way. Moses three times uses a word which calls attention to something totally unexpected. (It's the word sometimes translated "behold!") We might paraphrase Moses words: "Jacob was dreaming and – a stairway!...and angels!...and, look, there's the Lord Himself.!" (PBC)

*he dreamed* – To make sure this lonely traveler did not lose heart, the Savior-God surprised him with a vision of God Himself.

*Ladder.* Not a ladder with rungs, it was more likely a stairway such as mounted the sloping side of a ziggurat. (CSB)

The stairway (or ladder) links heaven and earth. St Bernard of Clairvaux: “Was any one of them either sitting, or standing still? It was not for angels to stand still on the uncertain rounds of a frail ladder; nor can anything remain fixed in the same condition during the uncertain period of this mortal life. Here have we no continuing city; nor do we yet possess, but always seek for, that which is to come. Of necessity you either ascend or descend, and if you try to stand still you cannot but fall” (*SLSB*, pp 119–20). Luther: “This dream signified that infinite, inexpressible, and wondrous mystery of the incarnation of Christ, who was to descend from the patriarch Jacob... This is a wonderful ascent and descent of the angels, to see the highest and the lowest completely united in one and the same Person, the highest God lying in the manger” (AE 5:217–18). (TLSB)

*angels of God were ascending and descending on it.* A sign that the Lord offered to be Jacob’s God. Jesus told a disciple that he would “see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (Jn 1:51). Jesus himself is the bridge between heaven and earth (see Jn 14:6), the only “mediator between God and men” (1Ti 2:5). (CSB)

The ladder symbolizes the uninterrupted communion between heaven and earth, mediated through God’s holy angels and instituted for the care and needs of God’s children on earth. The angels bear man’s needs before God and God’s help to man (Leupold)

Luther: “This dream signified that who was to descend from the patriarch Jacob... This is a wonderful ascent and descent of the angels, to see the highest and the lowest completely united in one and the same Person, the highest God lying in the manger” (AE 5:17-18). (TLSB)

**28:13-15** Here the Lord Himself renewed His covenant as it had passed from Abraham to Isaac and now to Jacob. (TLSB)

**28:13** *the Lord stood above it.* Mesopotamian ziggurats were topped with a small shrine where worshipers prayed to their gods. (CSB)

Christ interpreted this vision as a pre-incarnate appearance of Himself with His glorious angels (John 1:51). (TLSB)

The very promises which Jacob had tricked his father into giving him he now heard from the lips of God. Here was no deception. Jacob was to know where he stood with God. God considered him a child – weak and sinful, but reconciled to God! God promised Jacob that his descendants would be numerous, that they would inherit the land, and that through their one great Descendant all nation on earth would be blessed. (PBC)

**28:14** *your offspring shall all the families on earth be blessed.* Repeats the blessing of 12:3. (CSB)

The fulfillment of this promise is in Christ, the greatest descendant of Jacob, in whom all people are blessed by the fruit of His cross. Cf Gal 3:16. (TLSB)

**28:15** *I will not leave you.* Unlike the gods of pagan religions, in which the gods were merely local deities who gave protection only within their own territories, the one true God assured Jacob that he would always be with him wherever he went. (CSB)

**28:16** *Lord is in this place* – Jacob woke up the next morning with some mixed emotions. He was grateful for what God had told him, but the dominant emotion was a feeling of awe. Although he was a stranger surrounded by heathen, he had been in the presence of God. In this strange place God had established contact with him, had talked to him, had blessed him. (PBC)

He revealed Himself here. (TLSB)

**28:17** *gate of heaven* – A place where heaven and earth meet through God’s revelation. For where God’s Word is, there heaven is open with all graces. (TLSB)

**28:18** *pillar*. Stones were frequently used to commemorate significant events (31:45–54; Ex 24:4; Jos 4:1–9; 24:26–27; 1Sa 7:12; cf. Rev 3:12). (CSB)

Hebrew “matsebah” (spelled massebah in archaeological literature; plural is massebot). An elongated stone set in the ground like a short pillar, for cultural or religious purposes. The raising of such stone is ancient. They appear much like grave markers with rounded tops. At Canaanite temple sites, the stone could represent worshipers or gods, whose images are carved on the faces of some stones. Such stones could also serve as markers (cf. 31:52; 35:20). Jacob used the pillar in this way, to mark the spot where God appeared to him. He would later build an altar from this stone and others, and he would preach God’s name and sacrifice at this altar (v. 22) (TLSB)

*poured oil on top of it*. To consecrate it (see Ex 30:25–29). (CSB)

To show that God had hallowed it to become part of the altar. (TLSB)

**28:19** *Bethel* – This is Hebrew for “house of God. (PBC)

Using an ancient, common Semitic name for God, Hebrew ‘el. One evidence for the antiquity of the stories in Genesis is the fact that they never refer to the Canaanite god Baal, which Moses first mentions in Num. 25:3 when the Israelites are traveling toward the Promised Land. These circumstances accord well with evidence outside of Scripture that shows the emergence of devotion to the storm god Baal (earlier called Hadad) c 1500 BC. (TLSB)

*Luz* – Original Canaanite name. (TLSB)

**28:20** *made a vow* – God’s unexpected goodness to Jacob at Bethel brought forth one more response: “he made a vow.” His statement contained an “if” clause (language teachers call this the “protasis”) and a “then” clause (the apodosis”, and it isn’t immediately clear from the text where the division between the two is to be made. It might seem that a translation preferable to that adopted by the NIV and the KJV would be to have the “then” clause begin at verse 22. Jacob’s statement would then read: “If God will be with me...and if the Lord will be my God, then this stone that I have set up will be God’s house.” Regardless of which of the two translations we choose, however, we dare not regard Jacob’s words as bargaining with God (“God, if you do such-and-so for me, then you will be my God, otherwise not”). The Savior God had assured Jacob that He was his God, and that Jacob was a weak but dearly-loved child. How happy we can be that our status before God is a matter determined by God’s undeserved love, and is not dependent on our behavior! (PBC)

**28:21** *come again to mt father’s house*. Partially fulfilled in 33:18. (CSB)

*the LORD shall be my God*. For similar vows see Nu 21:2; 1Sa 1:11; 2Sa 15:7–8; for regulations governing vows see Nu 30; Dt 23:21–23. (CSB)

**28:22** *this stone ... will be God’s house*. In the sense that it would memorialize Jacob’s meeting with God at Bethel (see NIV text note on v. 19). (CSB)

Jacob would build an altar here. (TLSB)

*of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you.* A way of acknowledging the Lord as his God and King. (CSB)

**28:10–22** Long before becoming man, the Second Person of the Godhead appears to Jacob in a vision with ascending and descending angels. The Son of God tells how all nations will be blessed in Him through the line of Jacob. In thankfulness, Jacob vows to build an altar for the worship of the true God and to tithe. Even now, such promises are pleasing to God, if made in faith without superstition. We have much to be thankful for. Christ is our gateway to heaven. To forgive sins and strengthen our faith, Christ descends to us in His Word and Sacraments. • We praise You, Lord, for Your promises and mercy. Be with us as we ascend and descend in service to others. Amen. (TLSB)