

## Jacob Had a Dream at Bethel

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why it is important, even to very rebellious children, to know that they have the acceptance and approval of their fathers. In this topic, we will see what happened to Jacob as he traveled to Padan Aram to the family of his mother.

In Genesis 28:10-12, we read, “Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder *was* set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.” We see that Jacob left his parents, where they were living in Beersheba, and began the long trip to Padan Aram. We see what happened one night as he was traveling.

One evening, as he was traveling, he came to a certain place and decided to stay there for the night. He found one of the rocks there that he could use as the place to rest his head and then he laid down and went to sleep. Up to this point, we have not read about God speaking to Jacob as He had spoken to Abraham and Isaac. However, we see that was going to change that night as God chose to speak to Jacob in a dream. Throughout the Bible, we see that there were times when God spoke to individuals through a dream. A key thing to remember is the fact that when God spoke to anyone through a dream, everything that was said in that dream was consistent with the rest of the Bible. Deuteronomy 13:1-3 says, “If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’ —which you have not known— ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” Here, we see that people must be careful because God allows false dreamers to test the hearts of people.

Deuteronomy 18:20-22 adds, “‘But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’—when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that *is* the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” Here, we see that what one said, when a prophet spoke in the name of God – “Thus says the Lord...”, was to be right 100% of the time, which meant that what he said would have to always agree with the Word of God. If what a person said did not agree with the Word of God, the people were not to listen to that person.

Here, we see that what God said to Jacob, in this dream, was and is in agreement with everything that is taught throughout the rest of the Bible. In this dream, Jacob saw a ladder that stretched up from the earth and the top of the ladder reached up into heaven. In his dream, Jacob also saw the angels of God going up and down on a ladder. Then, Genesis 28:13-17 says, “And behold, the

LORD stood above it and said: ‘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.’ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.’ 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!’” When God spoke to Jacob, He reminded Jacob of the promises that He had given to Abraham and Isaac.

As God spoke, He told Jacob that He was the LORD God of Abraham and Isaac. First, God talked about the land. God said that the very place where Jacob was lying would be given to Jacob and his descendants. Israel actually took possession of this land during the time of Joshua, just as God had promised Abraham. God had told Abraham, in Genesis 15:13-16, “Then He said to Abram: ‘Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet complete.’” God had explained to Abraham why there would be a period of time before they possessed the land.

Second, God told Jacob that his descendants would be as the dust of the earth. This promise to Jacob also said that the people would spread out in all directions from the place where he was sleeping. Third, God told Jacob that through his seed all of the families of the earth would be blessed. Galatians 3:13-14 says, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree’), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” These verses explain how the family of Abraham has brought blessing to all families. Fourth, God promised Jacob that wherever he went, God would go with him and would bring him back to this land.

Then, Jacob woke up from his sleep. He had learned a very important lesson during his sleep that night, as he said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know *it*.” This is one of the things that every Christian needs to learn, because the Lord promised us in Hebrews 13:5, “*Let your conduct be* without covetousness; *be* content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” This new understanding caused Jacob to say, “How awesome *is* this place! This *is* none other than the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heaven!” This would become a very special place in the life of Jacob as he remembered how God spoke to him there.

Genesis 28:18-22 says, “Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God’s house, and of all that You give

me I will surely give a tenth to You.” For Jacob, this was the place where he met God, and this is the place where he later took his family after he told them to put away their foreign gods. Genesis 35:2-3 says, “And Jacob said to his household and to all who *were* with him, ‘Put away the foreign gods that *are* among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.’”

We see that Jacob got up early the next morning, took the stone that he had set for his head and set it up so that it became a pillar. Then, he poured oil on top of the stone. We see that Jacob gave that place a new name. The town that was nearby had formerly been called Luz. However, Jacob called this place “Bethel” which means *house of God*. Jacob also made a vow to God. This vow showed that he wanted to follow the Lord. However, his vow also showed that he had many things to learn about God as he put several conditions in his vow. First, Jacob said, “if God will be with me”. Jacob had not realized that God was with him until he received this dream. In verse 15, God had said, “Behold, I am with you.” God also promises us, in Hebrews 13:5b, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Second, Jacob also said, if God would “keep me in the way that I am going.” In verse 15, God had told Jacob, I “will keep you wherever you go.” Third, Jacob said, if God would “give me bread to eat and clothing to put on.” Matthew 6:26 says, “Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” Then, Matthew 6:28 adds, “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin.” Fourth, Jacob said that if “I come back to my father’s house in peace.” This was his greatest fear. Genesis 32:11 says, “Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me *and* the mother with the children.”

Jacob said that if God would meet these conditions, then the Lord would be his God and he would also give back to the Lord a tenth of whatever the Lord gave him. Jacob also said that the stone that he had set up would be God’s house. Jacob realized that the house of God is the place where we meet God. This shows that the “house of God” is not a building but a place where God changes our lives. Christ demonstrated that the house of God is where we meet God when Mark 1:35 says, “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” Christ frequently went alone to pray to the Father. We also want to help our physical and spiritual children come to understand that “the house of God” is where they personally meet with God and spend time alone in fellowship with Him. We want to help them learn to explain to others the importance of spending time alone in fellowship with the Lord. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand and apply this important lesson.