

When we last encountered Jacob in Genesis chapter twenty-seven, we witnessed the cunning scheme he employed to trick his elderly, blind father into granting him the inheritance that his father originally sought to bestow upon his older brother Esau.

As you might expect, that turn of events infuriated Esau, and he said to himself, “*When my father passes away, I will take revenge on Jacob*” (see [Genesis 27:41](#)). But Jacob’s mother, Rebekah, discovered Esau’s plan and formulated a plan of her own. She essentially told Jacob, “*Get out of town and go stay with my brother Laban in the city of Haran. When everything cools down, I’ll let you know when it’s safe to come back*” (see [Genesis 27:42-45](#)).

However, Jacob’s father Isaac had a few things to say to him prior to his departure...

***“Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: ‘You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother.***

***May God Almighty bless you, And make you fruitful and multiply you, That you may be an assembly of peoples; And give you the blessing of Abraham, To you and your descendants with you, That you may inherit the land In which you are a stranger, Which God gave to Abraham.’***

***So Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Padan Aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau” (Genesis 28:1-5).***

So, even though Isaac once sought to give his entire inheritance to Esau, it seems that he was now ready to acknowledge the fact that God had chosen Jacob to receive that blessing.

Nevertheless, Isaac faced a dilemma in his quest to find a suitable marriage partner for Jacob, [the same dilemma](#) that his father Abraham once encountered. Since there were few (if any) God-honoring families in that area, it was almost impossible to find an appropriate wife from among the members of the local population.

The solution was to do exactly as Rebekah suggested: “...***go at once to Paddan-aram, to the house of your grandfather Bethuel, and marry one of your uncle Laban’s daughters***” ([Genesis 28:2 NLT](#)).

Paddan Aram (also known as the “plain of Aram”) was about five hundred miles (800 km) away from Jacob’s home. Now Jacob may have expected this month-long journey to be relatively uneventful...

1. Go to Paddan Aram.
2. Find a wife.
3. Wait for Esau’s anger to subside.
4. Go back home.

Little did Jacob know when he set out on this journey that it would be a long, long time before he ever returned.

So Jacob left to begin a new life in a foreign land. But instead of continuing with the account of Jacob’s departure, our narrative from the book of Genesis will momentarily return to the life of Jacob’s brother, Esau...

***“Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, ‘You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan,’ and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Padan Aram.***

***Also Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac. So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had" (Genesis 28:6-9).***

Esau had previously married two Canaanite women who [made life miserable](#) for his parents, Isaac and Rebekah. But now, following Jacob's departure, Esau came to understand the gravity of his mistake: ***"Then Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan were evil in the eyes of Isaac his father" (LEB).***

So Esau decided to marry into his father's side of the family and selected a daughter of Ishmael, Isaac's half-brother. But much like his earlier marital choices, there is nothing to indicate that Esau prayed or sought God's His direction before making this decision. Instead, he apparently tried to please his father by doing what he thought was right.

This serves to illustrate Esau's core issue: his actions were primarily driven by his feelings. His father's disapproval of his previous marital relationships compelled Esau to select a new marriage partner, presumably one that his father might like better. Unfortunately, he did so with no apparent help, input, or direction from God.

If Esau had been more spiritually aware, he might have chosen a more suitable course of action. Unfortunately, we don't know how Isaac and Rebekah felt about Esau's new wife because she is never mentioned again in the Scriptures.

***"Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran" (Genesis 28:10).***

This short verse offers an opportunity for us to travel along with Jacob on this five hundred mile (800 km) journey to Haran. First, the tension between Esau and Jacob likely forced Jacob to leave home relatively quickly. While Jacob may have ridden a donkey or camel, it seems doubtful that he left with enough provisions for a month-long journey.

In addition, we know that Jacob was something of a homebody (see [Genesis 25:27](#)). As such, he probably wasn't well-prepared to defend against predatory animals and opportunistic thieves. Then there was the additional challenge of finding shelter along the way.

Jacob likely carried some money, but probably little else. In light of these things, we can say that Jacob faced many potential dangers as he embarked on this journey to 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" (Genesis 28:11).***

We'll later discover that Jacob gave the name "Bethel" to the place where he stopped for the evening. This location was about fifty miles (80 km) away from where he began this journey. Given the travel conditions of that era, one might cover that distance in a day under ideal conditions.

If there were no inns available for lodging after sunset, a traveler had to resort to sleeping outside. Such was the case with Jacob on this leg of his journey. But as he slept, Jacob experienced a very unusual dream...

***"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. And behold, the Lord stood above it..." (Genesis 28:12-13).***

Before we continue, let's take a moment to consider the imagery behind this dream. While God in heaven might seem unreachable for someone on earth, a person who had access to a staircase that reached to heaven could obtain access to God.

That seems to be the idea behind God's message to Jacob in this dream. Jacob was on earth, while God was in heaven. But Jacob could gain access to God by use of the stairway He provided. This symbolic imagery of "Jacob's Ladder" offers a good representation of Christ and His work in facilitating a bridge between God and humanity.

In fact, Jesus drew upon this same imagery when He said, "***I can guarantee this truth: You will see the sky open and God's angels going up and coming down to the Son of Man***" (John 1:51 GW). Another translation of that passage expresses that statement following manner: "***I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth***" (NLT).

This highlights Jesus' [role as a mediator](#), or the one who allows us to gain access to God. But Jesus doesn't merely point the way to God; He [is](#) the way to God. Jesus identified Himself as the intermediary who reconciles God and humanity when He said, "***...I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me***" (John 14:6).

But what is the significance of these angels as they ascend and descend upon this staircase? While it is never appropriate to address our prayers to angelic beings, this may suggest that God permits a certain degree of angelic involvement in the prayers and petitions offered by His people. Hebrews 1:14 offers support for this idea when it tells us, "***Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?***"

***"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'"*** (Genesis 28:13-15).

These promises echo God's earlier promises to Jacob's grandfather, Abraham ([Genesis chapter 12](#)) and his father Isaac ([Genesis chapter 26](#)). So, despite being homeless and alone, Jacob had the security of God's promise to protect him and provide for him.

It appears that God's message to Jacob had a profound impact upon him once he awoke...

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

One source has described the area where Jacob was traveling as "bleak and barren."<sup>(1)</sup> He was isolated from his family and likely had minimal possessions beyond the clothes he wore and anything he could transport. And until God addressed him through this dream, Jacob may have felt spiritually alone as well.

From all outward appearances, there was little to indicate that God was present with Jacob on this journey. Yet God was there with Jacob, just as he realized once he awakened: "***The LORD is here! He is in this place, and I didn't know it!***" (GNB).

In a similar manner, the events of daily life and the affairs of this world may sometimes cause us to question God's presence in our lives. Nevertheless, God is with us in those circumstances, just as He was for Jacob. Jacob's experience thus reminds us that God is present even amidst life's struggles and conflicts.

(1) Bethel in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. (n.d.). International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Online. <https://www.internationalstandardbible.com/B/bethel.html>

***“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!'”***

***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” (Genesis 28:17-19).***

So Jacob gave a new designation to the location where he experienced this dream: Bethel, a name that means “house of God.” Jacob then consecrated the place where God appeared to him by erecting the stone he slept upon and anointing it with oil.

This action designated a place that had been dedicated or set apart for God. Thus, Jacob made certain to memorialize this dream with a visible monument as a testament to God's presence in his life.

***“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'” (Genesis 28:20-22).***

It seems that Jacob persisted with his [affinity for bargaining](#), even with the almighty God who revealed His presence to him. In this instance, Jacob essentially sought to negotiate with God by saying, “*If You do something for me, then I'll do something for you.*”

Unfortunately, that approach amounts to little more than a business arrangement that fails to reflect the genuine, loving relationship God seeks with us. Yet even though Jacob's relationship with God still exhibited this recurring pattern of behavior, he was now on the path to spiritual growth.

In a similar manner, we may pass through different stages of growth and maturity as we progress on our spiritual journey. However, those who put their faith in Christ are on the road to becoming everything God intends for them to be.