

International Bible Lesson Commentary
Genesis 28:1, 10-22

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, October 27, 2013

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, October 27, 2013**, is from **Genesis 28:1, 10-22**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the *International Bible Lesson Commentary* website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught and in *The Oklahoman* newspaper.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Genesis 28:1, 10-22

(Genesis 28:1) Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, “You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women.”

Jacob negotiated with Esau for his birthright, and then Jacob deceived Isaac, his father, to steal Esau’s blessing. To save Jacob from being murdered by an enraged Esau, Rebecca easily convinced Isaac to send Jacob back to her

home in Haran to find a wife rather than have Jacob marry a Canaanite woman as Esau had done. The idolatrous culture of the women that Esau had married vexed both Isaac and Rebecca (see Genesis 26:34, 35 and Genesis 27:46).

(Genesis 28:10) Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran.

Knowing that Esau wanted to murder him for his deception and betrayal, Jacob easily became convinced that he should obey his father and go to Haran to seek a wife. Esau would not see his brother again until Jacob returned with Leah and Rachel and their children. Rebecca would never see Jacob again in this life.

(Genesis 28:11) He came to a certain place and stayed there for the 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.

Jacob traveled alone (as he thought), having left his family behind. On his first night away from home, Jacob slept under the stars. The stone served as a head support. Though he had Isaac's blessing, he did not take the inheritance due to him that would have resulted from also having Esau's birthright. Since Jacob returned to Esau a wealthy man and gave Esau many gifts, it appears Jacob never claimed the financial rewards that accompanied possessing Esau's birthright. What would be most important for Jacob and his children was the blessing that

would bless many descendants after him, and eventuate in the birth of Jesus Christ that would bless Jews and Gentiles.

(Genesis 28:12) And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

God gave Jacob a vision and spoke to him as he slept. God reassured Jacob that he was not alone. The ladder probably appeared more as a staircase that the angels used (and did not really need to do God's will) to do the bidding of God on earth. God reaches from heaven to earth to bless His people. The tower of Babel was an opposite situation, where some wanted to go up to heaven using a tower and take their place in heaven (with God or as gods) instead of filling the earth as God had commanded them (see Genesis 11:1-9).

(Genesis 28:13) And the LORD stood beside him 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;

Whereas angels ascended and descended to fulfill God's plans for them and others on the earth, the LORD himself stood beside Jacob and spoke to him directly, as he had done with Abraham. The LORD identified himself as the God of his father and grandfather, and Jacob knew about

what God had done in their lives. God reaffirmed that He would keep His promise to Abraham and Isaac through him. He too would have offspring, and he would live in the Promised Land and so would his descendants; the land God promised to Abraham and Isaac, the land his descendants would possess when Joshua led them into the land of Canaan.

(Genesis 28:14) and 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 all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring.

God gave Jacob the same promise He gave to Abraham and Isaac, which was also the blessing Isaac had bestowed upon Jacob when Jacob stole Esau's blessing. The promised way of salvation would not be through Esau to the Messiah. God would bless Esau and his descendants in other ways. God would not forsake them, and they could pass on the truth of God to their descendants if they chose. The promised way of salvation would be through Jacob and his descendants (the Jews) to Jesus the Messiah.

(Genesis 28:15) Know that 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."

Though Jacob thought he had left home alone with few possessions, God was with him and promised to be with

him and bring him back to the land he was leaving. God would do this because of His promise to Abraham and Isaac, and not because Jacob deserved the blessing or because he had stolen Esau's blessing. God reassured Jacob that He would be with him until He had done all He promised (which was equivalent to never leaving him). In the life of Jacob we get a glimpse of God's grace to the undeserving. We also get a glimpse of God's faithfulness to the children of those who are faithful and obedient to Him (as were Abraham and Isaac).

(Genesis 28:16) Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!"

Jacob woke from his dream knowing that he had experienced a real encounter with God, an encounter that was consistent with God's promises and work in the lives of Abraham and Isaac. The ladder of the LORD was in that place, and the LORD had come down to see him in that place, and the LORD was with him and in that place, but Jacob had not known this until his encounter with God. Jacob's experience does not mean that that is the only place where God has a ladder from heaven to earth for angels to ascend and descend. Rather, wherever Jacob went there would be a ladder so God's angels could come and meet his needs whenever God sent them. God's ladder is with everyone who trusts in Him.

(Genesis 28:17) 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.”

Though the LORD had spoken words of comfort to Jacob, Jacob could justifiably feel afraid when he thought about his meeting with God. He probably knew he deserved God’s just punishment for his deception of his father and theft from Esau. He was fleeing from Esau to save his life only to meet God, the Judge of all the earth. Rather than pronounce judgment against Jacob, God had graciously extended promises to bless him in his life’s journey. God did so for the sake of His promises to Abraham and Isaac. Later, Jacob would learn by experience the heartache that deception can bring to people.

(Genesis 28:18) So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he 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.

Just as Abraham rose early to honor God with his obedience, so Jacob rose early to honor God by transforming where he slept into a memorial and place for the worship of God. The stone for his head may have been long and cylindrical to make a pillar when stood on end. Oil would later be used to anoint priests in ceremonies as established by Moses. Oil could be used to set apart something common to make it sacred for holy use.

(Genesis 28:19) He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

The pillar would enable Jacob to find Bethel again when he returned home from Haran; Bethel means “house of God.” The pillar in its position would be seen by others as a sacred place and probably would not be disturbed. Unfortunately, pagan religions (and even Israel during times of spiritual decline) would worship pillars as idols or worship false gods at pillars. Since Jacob would not come back for 20 years, it is good that he set up that pillar as a memorial that he would recognize later.

(Genesis 28:20) 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,

Jacob was motivated by appreciation and thankfulness to God for promising to be with him and bless him. Though Jacob said “if,” he knew that God had promised to be with him, and he asked God for the basic necessities of life (food and clothing) on his journey and wherever he stayed. Jacob wanted to make a covenant with God in response to God’s grace. Jacob wanted to show his thankfulness to God when he said what he said.

(Genesis 28:21) so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God,

Jacob wanted to return to his father’s house in peace, knowing that Esau wanted to murder him. That was all he

asked of God upon his return. He did not ask for the birthright inheritance that he had bargained with Esau to get for the financial rewards that went with the birthright. He only asked for peace, and that meant peace with his brother. If Jacob had tried to claim Esau's birthright, he could not have returned home in peace. God granted Jacob his request when he returned home twenty years later. God also gave Jacob great wealth (probably as much or more than the inherited birthright would have been). The LORD would be his God because he would know by experience that the LORD had the grace and power to meet all of his needs, even when situations seemed impossible (such as the situation with his brother Esau, who hated him).

(Genesis 28:22) 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 surely give one-tenth to you."

Jacob promised to make Bethel a place of worship, and he promised to give one-tenth of all God gave him for God to use as God saw fit in the maintenance of a place of worship. God did not require this of Jacob, but Jacob wanted to show his appreciation to God because of all he received from the hand of God. Abraham gave one-tenth to King Melchizedek of Salem (see Genesis 14:18-20). Later, Moses would tell the Israelites to bring a tithe or one-tenth to the LORD.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How did God identify himself to Jacob? Why should this way of identification be important to Jacob?
2. What did the LORD promise Jacob? Why was this promise important?
3. What did the LORD say He would do specifically and personally for Jacob?
4. How did Jacob describe the place where God met him? How would you describe the place where you meet with God?
5. What did Jacob promise God?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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