



# International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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## **Genesis 28:10-22** **New International Version** **November 18, 2018**

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, November 18, 2018**, is from **Genesis 28:10-22**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

### **(Genesis 28:10) Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran.**

Beersheba means “Well of the Oath,” where Abraham and Abimelech made an oath, and where Abraham planted a tamarisk tree and called “on the name of the LORD, the Eternal God” (Genesis 21:22-34). The wells Abraham dug there made it an excellent place for Abraham, Isaac and his family to settle. Knowing that Esau wanted to murder

him for his deception and betrayal, Jacob easily became convinced that he should obey his father, Isaac, and go to Haran to seek a wife. He was to go to the same family of Abraham's in Haran where Abraham's servant had fetched Rebekah to be Isaac's 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. Before Jacob left, Isaac gave him the blessing of Abraham for him and his descendants (Genesis 28:3-5).

**(Genesis 28:11) 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.**

Having left his family behind, Jacob traveled alone (as he thought, for he would soon see angels). 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, a blessing that would bless Jews and Gentiles.

**(Genesis 28:12) 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.**

The LORD gave Jacob a vision and spoke to him as he slept. The LORD reassured Jacob that he was not alone. The ladder probably appeared more as a staircase that the angels used 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 with a stairway to 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) 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.**

Whereas angels ascended and descended to fulfill God’s plans for them and others on the earth, the LORD himself stood “above” the ladder (the NRSV reads that the LORD stood “beside him” 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) 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.**

God gave Jacob the same promise He gave to Abraham and Isaac, which was also the blessing Isaac had bestowed upon Jacob after 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, and Esau also became a wealthy man. God would not forsake them, and if they chose, they could pass on the truth of the LORD to their descendants. The promised Way of Salvation would be through Jacob and his descendants (the Jews) to Jesus the Messiah, who would bless all people, including the descendants of Esau and all who would believe in Him.

**(Genesis 28:15) 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.”**

Though Jacob thought he had left home alone and 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) When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of 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 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) 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.”**

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) 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.**

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. Jacob poured oil on top. Oil would later be used to anoint priests in ceremonies as established by the law of Moses. Oil was often used for ceremonial purposes to set apart something common to make it sacred for holy use.

**(Genesis 28:19) He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.**

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 watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes 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. Not wealth, but the blessing of Abraham from Isaac and from the LORD was of most importance to him.

**(Genesis 28:21) so that I return safely to my father's household, then the LORD will 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 his needs, even when situations seemed impossible (such as the situation with his brother Esau, who hated him for his deception).

**(Genesis 28:22) 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 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.

### **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?

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