

99-09-22b

We are back now from our break and ready to resume our study in Genesis. We're actually at the end of chapter 27, attempting valiantly to move into chapter 28. Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him.

Now you'll notice the birthright episode did not generate this level of animosity. Something about the blessing really tore it for Esau. And you have to think that Esau felt like he could gain the ground that he had lost in the birthright incident.

Remember the two parts of the inheritance. You have the birthright and you have the blessing. The birthright is the possessions side.

Whatever the father has by way of possessions at death, the double portion of that was to go to the eldest son. Now this is not to say that there shouldn't be something for other sons. If you remember the parable of the prodigal son that Jesus told, you remember that there were two sons there as well.

And the younger son said, Father, give me my portion of the inheritance. I want to go do my own thing. And of course he goes and squanders it, eats with the pigs and comes back.

And then the elder son that has been there all along says, Well, how come you're not throwing a party for me? But you will remember there was a portion of the possessions of the father that were designated for the younger son. So there should be a part of the birthright portion for each son. Just by virtue of birth as a son of that father.

There ought to be some possessions coming. Jacob already has his younger son portion of the birthright. And Esau barter it away.

So all of the material goods now would apparently be going to Jacob. He has his part plus his brother's part as far as the material inheritance. So the thing that Esau is looking for in the blessing is what? What is he hoping to attain? He's not a big believer in God.

He's not a worshiper in God. He apparently doesn't give a hoot and a rain barrel for the Abrahamic covenant. Or he would have been paying more attention all along.

He's a man of appetites. He's a man of the fields and so forth. But there is, I think, a superstitious or a mystical concern that he has because it is a known fact at this point in history, in the time of the patriarchs, that there is a confirming quality or a defining quality about what the father says on his deathbed when he seems to get a ministry of the Holy Spirit at the point that he pronounces the blessing.

And there is a fate that is sealed by those words. And Esau, whatever else he thinks about God and the things of God, he puts a lot of stock in what is going to be said and

what the future is going to hold for him and his descendants based on Isaac's words on his deathbed. And to be given the future, the birthright has to do more with the present and material goods, but the future and the fate and the outcome of things is designated in the blessing.

And Esau puts tremendous stock in this, as does Isaac. And Isaac decides that he is going to ensure, and we had a good question over the break, Dan said, well, does anybody besides Jacob and Esau know about the birthright transaction? Apparently Esau does. Apparently Isaac does.

Because when Esau, in his presence, says, is my brother not rightly named Jacob? He has cheated me these two times. He has took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing. And he said, have you not reserved a blessing for me? This is verse 36.

Isaac doesn't respond by saying, what do you mean he took your birthright? What do you mean you're not going to get the double portion? Apparently this is known to Isaac already. So this has become known. In fact, in a family setting like this, most things become known.

Because you'll notice in verse 41, that Esau says in his heart, the days of mourning for my father are at hand, then I will kill my brother Jacob. Verse 42, the words of Esau, her older son, were told to Rebekah. But how can his words be told to Rebekah if he said it in his heart? Well, not much can stay a secret for long in the family camp.

It's like a small town. It's worse than a small town. It's a tiny town.

And everybody there pretty much is going to find out about everything else that's going on. People hear things through tent flaps. I'm sure that because of the level of bitterness and consternation that Esau had, he spoke these things not only in his heart, but also maybe to Judith and Basimath or somebody else in the periphery.

And some servant in the periphery comes and tells Rebekah. You get the idea that not much gets past Rebekah. She pretty much knows everything that goes on.

So it seems clear that the transfer of the birthright to Jacob, the contract, it would have to be known. It couldn't be kept a secret. Otherwise, how could Jacob hope to actually receive the possessions at the point of Isaac's death unless it was known and accepted by all that this was a legal transaction? It may not have been an ethical transaction, but it's legal.

As you know, even today there's a big difference between what's legal and what's ethical. So this blessing is a big deal for all concerned. Rebekah knows that it's a big deal.

That's why she hatches this plot conspiracy with her son Jacob. Esau knows it's a big deal because when he finds out that this blessing has been pronounced on his brother, he is deeply upset. We didn't see this level of upset over the birthright.

He didn't come back a week later and say, how could you do this to me? He doesn't seem to have raised much of a fuss. But here, you have the bitter cries and lifting up the voice and weeping. And he says, have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me, me also.

And as we saw last time, Isaac, in thinking that he's blessing his favorite son, has given the totality to the son that he's blessing, which turns out to be Jacob, and he doesn't have anything left. And this was a wrong. If this had, in fact, been Esau, it would have been a great wrong to Jacob to have not had any blessing left over.

You will see Jacob in the latter chapters of Genesis blessing his twelve sons and even his grandsons, Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and he reserves a blessing for each. This is how it's supposed to be. Abraham gave a blessing to Ishmael and to his other sons.

We know that Abraham had other sons. Remember, he had other wives beyond Sarah, after Sarah's death, and had other sons. And he gave them a blessing, but he sent them east.

He sent them away from the favored son, the firstborn son, Isaac. So this was wrong for Isaac to try to bless Esau in secret to give him the whole blessing without reservation. Did Isaac think, well, since Jacob got the birthright, I won't give him a blessing? We don't know what the thought process was.

But this winds up, ironically, coming back to haunt Isaac. And Isaac is in a period of failure. We've seen this illustrated in his blindness and his infirmity.

He isn't, in fact, on his deathbed. He's got quite a number of decades left to live. So, when Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing, he said in his heart, the days of mourning are at hand.

Once Isaac is out of the picture, I will kill Jacob. I will revenge myself on him. These words come to Rebekah.

So she called Jacob, her younger son. And we have an echo of what happened the first time Rebekah heard something that she sort of wasn't supposed to hear. She called Jacob, her younger son, and said to him, Surely your brother Esau comforts himself concerning you by intending to kill you.

Now, therefore, my son, obey my voice. Arise, flee to my brother Laban in Haran, and stay with him for a time until your brother's fury turns away, until your brother's anger

turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him. She doesn't say what we have done to him.

She says what you have done to him. And you don't have Esau saying, I'm going to kill my brother and my mother. He obviously would have figured out the details of this, that Rebekah had a hand in this and would have had to assist.

But his anger is all directed toward Jacob. Until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him, then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereaved also of you both in one day? She would actually be getting bereft of everyone because Isaac will die.

Esau will kill Jacob. Jacob will die. And then Esau, of course, is going to be under the penalty of death for killing his brother.

That penalty which God put into effect right after the flood was not necessarily in effect for Cain, but it is going to be for Esau. If he kills Jacob, he will be under penalty of death. So she's going to lose her entire family in one stroke.

So Rebekah said to Isaac, I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth. And we've discussed this intermarrying with the daughters of the land. This is another failure on Isaac's part.

He is the patriarch. He has done nothing to stop this. He did nothing to ensure that Esau would marry from within the clan.

And you get the idea that Isaac, somewhere in the back of his mind, knew that Esau was not going to follow the pattern of his father Abraham and the pattern that he himself was in in marrying Rebekah. Because he was passive when this double marriage took place with Judith and Basmath. If Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth like these who are the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me? So then in chapter 28, 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 Paddan 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. That here is the substance of the blessing. And you get the idea that the blessing which was done under the misconceptions of the deceit is now confirmed by Isaac for real.

He knows now who he is blessing. And he gives the right blessing. The blessing that he thought he was giving to Esau was sort of a materialistic blessing.

It only peripherally mentioned God at all. It was all about the dew of heaven and the fruit of the earth and so forth. He says, You smell like a field that God has blessed.

May God give you of the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth. Plenty of grain and wine. Let people serve you.

This is all sort of temporal blessing. Let nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren.

Let your mother's sons bow down to you. You get the idea that Isaac is trying to reverse the prophecy that God gave before the sons were born. That the elder would serve the younger.

Isaac has to know this and yet he thinks he's telling Esau your brother is going to serve you. Cursed be everyone who curses you. Blessed be those who bless you.

But this doesn't really reflect the substance of the spiritual heritage coming down from Abraham. It doesn't reflect the Abrahamic covenant, does it? But now it is as though the scales have fallen from Isaac's eyes in more ways than one. He knows that he's blessing his son, Jacob.

He knows that Jacob is the line through which the promise is going to be perpetuated and that Jacob cannot intermarry with the daughters of the land. And you get the idea that this whole experience really woke Isaac up in a lot of ways. So much so that he's not even going to die.

And I think that this is probably a turning point in the soul of Isaac. More about that presently. But now in verse 3, this is the transfer of the Abrahamic covenant.

The promises from God. 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 so that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger which God gave to Abraham. This is not just the dew of heaven or the fruit of the earth.

This is the specific land, the territorial boundaries that God promised to Abraham. And really, this is the genuine blessing. I suspect that this is truly the blessing.

The previous thing was sort of a legal transaction in the eyes of men. But this is the point at which the actual blessing, I think, is transferred to Jacob. And it's done knowingly, consciously, and by the ministry of the Spirit, by Isaac.

And it doesn't in any way negate the previous blessing or take away its force. But this is the spiritual substance that is supposed to be a part of the blessing. Verse 5, So Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.

And you get this kind of fulsome description of where he went because this is... We read

books to the girls. We've done this for a number of years. You always know when you get to a chapter break or a major division in a book because in a lot of cases there will be a step back and kind of a fresh start or a fresh perspective.

This really would have been a great place for the chapter break between 27 and 28. It's not where it is. But verse 5, I think ought to be verse 1 of chapter 28 because he went to Laban the son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.

We know these things already but this is our fresh start. This is the beginning of the Jacob-Laban stories. And we're not going to see Esau now for a number of chapters.

And so this is a fresh turning point. And before we leave what we have seen with Jacob in the household of Isaac and Jacob and Esau and that whole interaction. If we step back for a moment and think about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob I think it's a productive question to ask why are there these three patriarchs? God is going to identify himself forever after.

I am the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob. Why wasn't it just Abraham and Jacob? Why is Isaac in there? Why are there three patriarchs? Three of course is a number that reflects perfection. The Trinity itself is an expression of perfection.

And we've seen many other threes, the three days that are the sign of Jonah and are the time that Jesus spent in the heart of the earth. It is the fulfillment. It is the completion and perfection of certain things in God's plan.

You have Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Why the three patriarchs? I think that in the lives of each of these men we see things that God could not necessarily sum up in just one or two patriarchs. You think about Abraham, he is the man who had the faith to leave his country and his kindred and depart and go into the land.

When you think about Isaac, he's the man that never left the land. And when you get to Jacob, he's the one that's going to depart the land and sojourn for 20 years in Syria, in Paddan Aram. Aram, of course, is what you might say Aramea.

It's Syria. It's outside the land of promise. Abraham wanted to ensure that Isaac never left the land and so he sent the servant to go find a wife.

Why doesn't Isaac do that for Jacob and find some trusted servant to bring a wife in? But there are aspects of the life of each of these men that are unique. There are many similarities. We're going to see some similarities as we go forward with Jacob that will hark back to both Abraham and Isaac.

But you remember the echoes of experience that Isaac had without ever leaving the land with passing off his wife as his sister and re-digging the wells of his father and this sort of thing. But all of these are foreshadowing the experience of God's people in later times.

There is a sense in which God says, Out of Egypt I have called my son.

And Israel as a nation comes out of the land of Egypt and goes to the land of promise just as Abraham does out of Ur. And he has this delay in Haran which he really should not have had. But he stays there for a long time until he finally shakes loose and comes out to the land of promise.

This is going to happen to Israel, isn't it? They leave Egypt. They could have gone straight into the land but there's this delay. And it's 40 years before they actually move into the land of promise with Joshua.

So Abraham's life foreshadows these things. Isaac is the one who is in the land and never leaves. But I detect, and you can always be accused of reading too much in, but you remember where we find Isaac when the servant returns with Rebekah? He's not with his father Abraham up in Hebron, is he? He's down there in the place where Hagar encountered the Lord, Bir Lahai Roi, the place or the well of the God who sees me.

And it seems to me, I suspect, it seems to be suggested, because, by the way, Abraham is still alive when Rebekah returns. Abraham is still alive when the twins are born. But we don't see him.

He's not co-located. Isaac, from the time that he's an adult, seems to be separate from Abraham. You almost wonder if there wasn't sort of a lot type of experience where Isaac abandoned the faith and the presence of his father.

And he says, well, I'm going to go seek God for myself. He doesn't go to the place where Abraham encountered God up there near Hebron, up in the mountains, not far from Jerusalem or where Jerusalem will be. He goes down to where Hagar encountered God, Bir Lahai Roi.

He says, I'm going to find God on my own terms or not in the shadow of my father. And you never see Abraham again after the servant returns. It tells us about his later history.

He marries these other women, but there seems to have been an estrangement because Isaac, unlike Jacob and Esau, who remain with Isaac, Isaac doesn't remain with Abraham, doesn't stay in the same camp. He goes off by himself and lives separately. He dwells at Bir Lahai Roi and he seems to be looking for God on his own terms rather than on the terms of his father Abraham.

And you have to say that even though Isaac learns things and we've seen his life and his experiences with Abimelech and so forth down in Gerar, he doesn't ever seem to really reflect the active faith of Abraham. He's one who remains in the land but seems to kind of go tepid. And he doesn't really have that active faith, that initiating kind of faith that Abraham has.

And I think he is a reflection of Israel in the land who has fits and spurts of faith such as under David and the time of the building of the temple and so forth, but so easily diverted and so easily distracted by the very existence in the land to have been lulled to sleep in terms of active faith. There's not opposition. He doesn't fight the battles that Abraham fights.

He doesn't go against the kings of the plain or rescue captives from slavery as Abraham does. He just kind of bounces from place to place in the land and he has a few run-ins with Abimelech. But outside of that, the next time we see him, he's old and feeble and thinks he's on his deathbed when he's really not.

He's sort of dead before his time. And isn't this what happens to Israel once they're in the land of promise hundreds of years later? Now we're coming to Jacob. Jacob is the one that is actually going to leave the land and sojourn in a country not his own, in a household not his own for 20 years in the house of Laban, 7 years for Leah, 7 years for Rachel, 6 years for his flocks and herds, and then he's going to return.

And we're going to see, as I mentioned in the first lesson, that this experience is going to be bracketed by supernatural appearances of God. God is going to confront Jacob on his way out of the land and he's going to confront him again on his way back in. We don't find this sort of communication and direct revelation with Isaac, do we? We had it with Abraham, but not with Isaac.

But Jacob, although he has perpetrated great wrongs, he's scheming and conniving and deceptive and tries to gain the things that God has promised him by brute force instead of waiting on God's timing. The promise was given before he was born that his brother would serve him, but he's not content to wait on that. He tries to take it in his own two hands and he's going to wind up now fleeing out of fear of his brother and leaving with nothing.

He has no possessions. All of the things that Isaac has just pronounced upon him by way of blessing, he has none of them. They're all conceptual.

They're all future. He doesn't own any land. He doesn't have any flocks.

He doesn't have any herd. He doesn't have any descendants. He's one guy, hightailing it out of the very land that has just been given to him by way of promise.

And, of course, Israel is going to have this experience. They have all of the promises, the Abrahamic covenants, the Davidic covenant, the Palestinian covenant, and yet, right now, Israel possesses none of these things and won't until Jesus Christ returns and fulfills the Old Testament promises. This is something I'll return to down the road a little bit, but it is interesting to look at the chronology of the events that take place in this portion of Genesis.

Abraham lives roughly in the 2100 B.C. time frame. And you have roughly 2,000 years of history with Israel, Abraham on down to the time of Christ, and we've had roughly 2,000 years of history from Christ to the present. And it is as though the church has been given equal time with Israel.

And there are some interesting correspondences right down to the years that certain things took place, especially if you figure it from the beginning of the church age rather than from the B.C.A.D. crossover point, because you have a 30-something year difference there. But if you see the turning point not at the birth of Christ, as our chronology tends to put it, but at the cross of Christ, or at Pentecost, and calculate the years back to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob, Jacob's descent into Egypt, the sojourn and the time of departure from Egypt in 1446 B.C., and then you look forward into the present day, it's very fascinating, because somewhere in the ballpark of the year 2030, if you mirror imaged the past and the present, if you mirror imaged the history of Israel beginning with Abraham, you find the mirror time right at around 2030, which is a significant time in several other ways as well. But the time of Jacob's sojourn out of the land is 20 years, as we will see.

And if you look at those years as centuries, then you would find Israel out of the picture of God's plan for roughly that same amount of time. Anyway, I'll give you a little more than just a tantalizing hint of that a little bit further down the road. Jacob receives the blessing.

Isaac sent Jacob away. He goes to Padan Aram, to Laban the son of Bethel, the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau. Verse 6, 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 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. This is Esau's solution to this problem.

He goes to Ishmael and took Mahalat, the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife in addition to the wives that he had. So he thought, well, this will get me back into the good graces. I'll go to my cousins over here and marry into the Ishmaelites.

So now in addition to allying himself with Canaan, he has also allied himself with Egypt. And what his mental calculations were that this was somehow going to make things better, I can't fathom. But I think, again, if you look at Isaac and his estrangement from Abraham, Esau may still be operating on the fact, well, old dad here went down to Bir Lahai Roy.

He went to the place of Hagar. He went down there to the place that's on the way to Egypt. And that's where he took his little spiritual journey and so forth.

So I'll head down that same region and get myself a wife from there. And that will re-ingratiates me with Isaac. And you get the idea that Isaac almost felt more of an affinity for the Ishmaelites.

There is a note that when Abraham died, Isaac and Ishmael buried him together. Remember that? So you get the idea that Isaac somehow almost has more of an affinity for his estranged half-brother than he does for his own father. And that Esau is working that angle in this marriage.

That, well, now I've married from within the family, so to speak. And yet he doesn't see the obvious spiritual significance of marrying into the rejected side of the Abrahamic line rather than the accepted side. He doesn't say, well, I'll go to Paddan Aram too.

And I'll get a wife from up there. He goes the other direction. And it's just another indication of the blindness and the lack of spiritual insight or spiritual perception that characterizes Esau.

Verse 10, Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place. Now, this once again, and this is a pattern we've seen so often in Genesis.

It's important to remember because you will come across commentaries on the creation story and one thing or another people trying to say, well, this is a conflation of two different accounts and one thing or another. In Hebrew narrative, it is common to state something as a fact and then go back and talk about how it happened. You have the days of creation.

On the sixth day, he created man in his own image. Male and female created he them and so forth. Then you go back to chapter 2 and you get the detail of the story about how Adam was formed out of the dust of the ground and the rib was taken out and Eve was formed and so forth.

And it's already been stated on the sixth day, but then you go back and review that. It's been stated twice now that Jacob left and went to Paddan Aram to the household of Laban, Rebecca's brother. But now, in verse 11, he's not there yet.

We're back on the way. He's on the journey to get there. He came to a certain place and we'll find when we get the location of this place that he's still in the land.

He hasn't crossed out of the land of promise yet. He went out from Beersheba, which of course is down toward the south. Remember the common phrase in the later Old Testament, from Dan to Beersheba? Beersheba is down south.

Dan is up north. And to span the land, they would say, well, this thing is known from Dan to Beersheba. Or they collected the men, all the men assembled from Dan to Beersheba.

So, way down south, he's got quite a ways to go north before he's going to get out of the land of promise and into the place where Laban dwells. And on this journey now, he comes to a certain place, which is purposely not named. Later on, we're going to find the name of it.

It has a name, but it's not given to us here. It's 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.

When you look at all the Bible illustrations and flannel graph figures and so forth that go with this story, they always show Jacob getting a little stone and making a pillow out of it. He kind of lays his head on it and goes to sleep. Well, that doesn't wash because later he's going to set this stone up and make a monument out of it.

And it's not a stone that he uses as a pillow that he puts under his head. He puts it at his head. This is the very same phrase that's used over in 1 Samuel 26.

Do you remember when Saul and Abner are camped? They're out in the hills looking for David and they haven't found him and so they go to sleep at night. And it says that Saul put his spear at his head. Well, he didn't lay his spear down and try to use it as a pillow.

He stuck it in the ground and had it at his head. That's so nothing can come at him from the head side. It's got to come at him from the foot side.

It's sort of a way of... It's kind of like sleeping with your back in a corner so that nothing can sneak up on you from behind. So, in the same way, there's this large, long stone and when Jacob decides to bed down for the night, he rests his head on the ground near this stone so that something that comes up on him at night he's going to be able to see it. It's not going to come from the head part and brain him or something.

So, he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head. Now, he took it and put it so it's big enough to move. It's not a huge thing that he's got to drag with ropes and mules.

It's probably a... We figure maybe 60, 70, 80 pound stone or something. Maybe he drags it, he rolls it. But he's found a place where he wants to sleep and he drags the stone over and puts it at his head as a shield or a protection.

Then he lays down for the night to sleep. Verse 12, Now, the word here translated ladder is a hapax legomena. Hapax meaning one, legomena meaning word.

It only occurs once in scripture and this is it. And this particular word, it has cognates.

There are some nouns that are related to it.

There are some cognates in other languages. But basically, the idea here, it is used... There's a word related to this that's used later on to talk about a siege ramp that is laid up against the wall of a city to overcome it. And it is used in other places to refer to a paved highway.

Not in a town or a city, but this would be a highway out in the wilderness perhaps that is a smooth thoroughfare. It's used in Acadian of the stairway on the side of a ziggurat to get from the bottom to the top of a ziggurat. You have this ramp or stairway that you can ascend to get from the bottom to the top.

Some of these, if you've ever seen pictures of ziggurats, were actually a spiral affair that goes up. This doesn't appear to have been a spiraling type of thing going around a tower of some sort. It's not necessarily steps.

We don't know for sure that it has cut steps. It could be more like a ramp. But it appears to be straight and it appears to have one end on the earth and the other end in heaven.

And the word stand is used here several times and so is the word rosh or head. Jacob takes one of the stones of that place and he put it at his head, his rosh. And he lay down in that place to sleep.

He dreamed and behold a ladder was set up on the earth and its rosh, its top, reached to heaven. There the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 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. If there was any doubt in Jacob's mind because of the way that he had obtained the blessing, that it was real, Jacob might have had doubts. Well, you know, I'm not sure God is going to honor that blessing because I used treachery and deceit to obtain it.

God confirms what Isaac spoke. Just as Jacob is about to leave the land, God confirms to him that he is in fact the possessor of this blessing. That God is in fact going to be with him.

That God is going to bless him and fulfill all of these promises. He will be with him wherever he goes and will bring him back to this land. This is the promise that God has

made to the nation of Israel, isn't it? Even though they are sojourning, even though they are outside the land and I know there's a nation of Israel there, but the Israel of God, the Israel to whom the promises have been made, the Israel that is spoken of in spiritual terms in the Bible is not yet in the land and won't be until God regathers them formally.

But they have that promise that even though they have left the land and are sojourning away for a period of time, God will bring them back and will fulfill all of these promises. And God makes these promises to Jacob at a time when he has no material evidence of any of it. He owns no land.

He has no possessions. He has no descendants. And this is entirely a faith operation.

God tells him these things. He has no evidence to that. And it's entirely whether or not he believes that this is a real and true thing that God has said.

And of course he does. In verse 16, he awoke from his sleep and said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know. He was afraid and said, How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God.

Bet El. Bet is house. If you look at the letter bet in Aramaic, it's got the shape of a little house with a floor and a roof and a wall and a doorway you can walk in.

This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. So Jacob rose early in the morning and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar. So this was sort of a longish stone, and he sets it up on one end and poured oil on top of it.

He anoints it, sanctifies it like an altar, and he called the name of that place Bet El, house of God. The name of that city had been Luz previously. That's the Canaanite name for that place.

There must have been a town nearby called Luz. 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.

So Jacob makes a vow, and he says, If all of these things are true, and there's some question about where to put the turning point, whether it is so that I come back to my father's house in peace and the Lord shall be my God, then this stone which I have set up shall be God's house and I will give a tenth. All of these phrases are linked together by the Hebrew letter waw, or vav if you're German. And we have a variety of ways in English of translating that.

We can say, but, now, then, so, and you see a variety of these here, and keep me in this

way that I am going and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on so I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. Well, these are all the Hebrew letter waw. And it's just a conjunction.

It means and. And so to find the logical break-over point between the condition that is to be met and the vow that Jacob makes is open to some interpretation. But God says he is the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and he makes these promises.

And you get the idea that when Jacob makes this vow, he says, if indeed God will be with me and keep me in the way that I'm going, give me bread and clothing so that I come back, and the Lord shall be my God. This is the definition of God being his God, that he's going to protect him, care for him, provide for him, and so forth. If all of these things are true, then what is it that Jacob can do? What is Jacob's performance? What's the performance aspect of the vow? I will set this pillar up.

Actually, he says this pillar will be God's house. And all that you give me, I will surely give a tenth. So the tithe is Jacob's promise.

Jacob says if all these things are true and if all of this takes place and I return here, I will give a tenth to you. And this, of course, is the first place where you find the performance of the tithe. We had Abraham giving a tithe to Melchizedek earlier on.

And here you have Jacob making a promise. What is the manner of giving to God a tenth of all that he has? If he has a tenth of the flocks, does this mean that he's going to sacrifice all of them and grain and descendants and so forth? What exactly does that mean? A tithe can be more than just a material giving. It can also be a dedication.

It can be a commitment. So this is the substance of chapter 28. And we find that there is a change in Jacob at this point because now he has confidence.

He can depart the land with confidence. This is the first act of worship. This is the first real distinction that we see between Jacob and Esau because at the point of the blessing, at the point of leaving the land, God reveals Himself to Jacob and Jacob responds in the affirmative.

Jacob recognizes he is awed by this vision and he responds. There are some great passages in the New Testament that refer back to this time. You can think of the words of Jesus in John 1:51 that He says, You will see the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

What is the bridge that makes it possible to go from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven? There's also a fascinating parallel here when you think about the Tower of Babel that we studied back in Genesis chapter 11 because what was going on there? They said we're going to build a tower and have its top go up to the heavens. Man started the building on earth and was going to try to build his way to heaven or at least be able to

observe what's going on in heaven. It could have been astrological observations.

Most of the ziggurats that have been on earth seem to be astrology centers. But you have the idea of man trying to build this stairway to God, as it were. But we find instead that God initiates this stairway in heaven and God stands at the top of it and He is the one that bridges the gap between heaven and earth.

And in John 1, you find that Jesus Christ Himself is that bridge and is foreshadowed here in the vision of Jacob. Ultimately, when God says, In you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed, the literal stairway, Jesus Christ, is of the seed of Jacob. And through Him, truly all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

So the blessing has found its rightful resting place. Jacob is a man of faith. He is going to proceed on the basis of what God has revealed to him.

He's going to have his ups and downs. But as a man of active faith, as a man who sets up the stone and vows to return and vows to dedicate a tenth of his goods to God, he has already stepped out of the shadow of his father Isaac and is worthy to be numbered amongst those three great patriarchs, each of which are going to reflect a different aspect of God's dealing with man specifically through the nation of Israel. This is where we're going to have to stop for this morning.

We will resume our study next time in chapter 29. Let's close in prayer. Father, we thank You for the wonderful promises that You have made to us, the blessing that we have received through our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray that we will see our way clearly to think and to act in accordance with the resources that You have granted to us. We pray that as we set our priorities, as we make our decisions and live our lives day by day, that we will be mindful of our calling and perceive our opportunities so that we will reflect the glory of our Savior and will fulfill the purpose for which You have left us on this earth. We thank You for the nourishment that we receive from Your Word and we pray that it will have its effect in our souls in the days ahead.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.