

99-10-06b

We're ready now to resume our study in Genesis chapter 28. As we see Jacob waking up from his vision and realizing that God is in this place, he memorializes it by taking the rock that was at his head and setting it up and anointing it and this is the marker. But if and once again if we observe the details here there are some things that tell us something about Jacob because we haven't really seen much in the way of faith or turning to God or sensitivity to God's plan and purpose in Jacob's life up to this point have we? He's not been all that admirable and has done some pretty tacky things to put it mildly with regard to his brother but he seems to respond favorably.

We've seen God appear to other people haven't we? We saw God appear to Hagar and make promises to Hagar on two different occasions but there didn't really seem to be a response to that. Hagar doesn't try to stay in the promised land or she gets a wife for her son Ishmael from Egypt doesn't she? It kind of tells us that it didn't it didn't take. God's grace was available, God's grace was there.

She availed herself of it but it didn't change the direction of her life and she basically returns to Egypt and gets her son's wife from there. So we often think well if I was Saul on the Damascus Road and Jesus appeared to me I'd become a great apostle and go to Borneo and be a missionary and eat bugs and live a self-sacrificing life and you just sort of expect that when God appears to someone why that's it from now on they're going to be a dedicated glow-in-the-dark believer for the rest of their days and it's not necessarily the case you see a lot of people to whom God appeared and they don't an appearance from God is not in and of itself necessarily a life-changing experience. Balaam is a good example.

Go over and read the story of Balaam. We don't have time to go there tonight but God speaks directly to him. You got the whole angel in the road donkey episode and God confronting him and nearly slaying him and yet Balaam comes to a bad end.

Trace out the end of Balaam's life. It doesn't necessarily take. Look at King Saul.

King Saul gets anointed by the Prophet, has supernatural signs of affirmation that he's the king. It's prophesied to him that these men are going to meet him as he's coming and he gets God's portion of the sacrifice, gets the high part of the thigh meat that is God's portion of the sacrifice Samuel gives to him and has all these amazing things and Saul spirals ever downward until he finally dies at Gilboa. There are numerous other examples I could name but don't think and people think today well you know the reason people don't get an interest in God is they just haven't had a sufficient revelation of him.

With a sufficient revelation who in their right mind would not respond to God? Well you know it depends on how you define a right mind but there are a lot of people. In fact everybody in the human race that ever comes to accountability has an encounter with

God. A direct personal face-to-face one-on-one encounter with God.

It's God the Holy Spirit who confronts them with the issue of sin and the issue of righteousness and the issue of judgment and there are many many of us who don't respond. There are many of us as believers who have had an encounter with God, who have a sealing, indwelling Holy Spirit, who have heard and have tasted the good word of God and the power of the age to come and all of the rest of the things talked about in Hebrews recently and it doesn't affect us. We go forward, we're caught up in this life, we are too much in this world and we measure, we set our goals, we set our hopes and dreams and aspirations all in the earthly realm and God is an adjunct.

He's a convenient resource when the chips are really down or when all else fails. I was talking to my uncle, always very stimulating conversations with him and he reminded me of an interesting observation that why is it that we, when we've exhausted all other recourse and every other option, we say well you know there's nothing left to do but pray. Why isn't prayer the first recourse? Why isn't that the first weapon in our arsenal? But we, you know, it's just real easy to fall into the trap of well I'm going to try plan A and then plan B and plan C and plan C.1 and C.2 and C.3 and plan D and plan E and plan F and yeah I've exhausted everything, I'm out of time, I'm out of money, I'm out of options, there's nothing left to do but pray and that shouldn't be the way our lives are but it's often the way it is and we have had a personal encounter with God.

We have been united with the Lord Jesus Christ. There are people in evangelism who if the gospel is shared and someone doesn't respond to go home and just beat themselves up and torture themselves, I didn't say the right thing, I wasn't eloquent enough, I wasn't prepared enough, I didn't lay enough groundwork, I spoke too soon, I said too much, I said too little, I was this, I was that and get all caught up in feeling like it's their fault because if they had done it right the person would have responded in a positive way and it's a shame because that's just not the case. God himself will face people and those people will not want to live with him for eternity.

It's a hard concept to grasp but there are people who, there are creatures who would just rather not. Satan and one-third of the angels have made that choice and they were in the heavenly realms. Look at God, Lucifer stood in the throne room of God for who knows how long and observed his glory and had the highest privileges that any creature has ever enjoyed and he decided that wasn't for him.

He wanted to do something different, had other plans, had different aspirations. He'd rather be like God than serve God. He would rather perform God-like functions to a select group of subordinates.

He would like to be God to them. I'm sure Satan is smart enough to realize that he can't be God and create universes and so forth but he said I will be like God. I will be like the Most High.

I will raise my throne above the stars of heaven. I can administrate. I can't necessarily do the creation and so forth but me and these angels, I can be their God.

I can set policy and we can do our own thing. Why do we have to conform to God's way of doing things? If a perfect creature in perfect environment standing in the throne room of God and beholding his glory can reject him, what it tells me is that it is not the degree of revelation that motivates us. It is not the degree of revelation that determines whether or not we choose God.

It's our own choice. We are responsible for what we do with the revelation that we receive. Every person gets sufficient revelation to make that choice and it's not like, well, more revelation.

Nobody's going to be standing there at the great white throne of judgment. Well, they may say this but it won't be valid. Well, if you had just shown yourself to be more.

You remember the Israelites talking to the Jews in Jesus Day? The Israelites did it in Moses Day. They did it in Jesus Day. We've all done it in virtually every generation.

Show us a sign. If there's just a sufficient enough miracle, why, we'll believe and we'll have faith. We'll look at the miracles God did.

Which of the Israelites didn't see the ten plagues? Which of the Israelites didn't see the Red Sea part? Every single living one of them walked on dry ground through the Cecil B. DeMille walls of water and saw the horse and rider and chariots drowned in the sea. Every single one of them saw that miracle and virtually every single one of them within a week was grouching and complaining and saying God has brought us out here to die. I wish I had the leeks and garlicks of Egypt.

So I will never be convinced and I don't think you can find in the Bible evidence that it just takes enough revelation and if there's enough revelation anybody can be convinced. Well, here's Jacob and Jacob has had a vision of God. He has had a personal visit and has had a statement of promise from God just like Hagar, just like Cain.

Didn't Cain have a personal visit from God? If you do well, will you not be accepted? That was before he killed his brother. God came and spoke in this fashion to Cain. Well, if God would come and speak to me, I would be on fire.

You could stack 10 milligrams next to me, you know, we think. And it's just not the case. The Word of God that we have before us is the greatest revelation we can get of God and a lot of us get exposed to it and it doesn't seem to sufficiently motivate us.

It doesn't transform us. It doesn't become the basis upon which we live our lives. You look around us at our brothers and sisters in Christ and not to say there's not a lot of wonderful believers out there, but look how many of us are not really seeking, asking,

knocking, willing to set aside the details of this life to please God at any cost and to please God if it means being obscured, to please God if it means letting go of a lot of things in this earthly life.

We've always had this trouble. That's why the scriptures have told us for hundreds of years and generation after generation, don't seek your treasure on earth, lay up treasure in heaven. It was told to the Old Testament generation, it's told to the new.

So this is a significant thing when Jacob, we just take it for granted, well sure, vision from God, of course he's going to build an altar, he's going to respond, he's going to be motivated. Not necessarily. Jacob takes advantage of the opportunity just like his grandfather Abraham did.

When God appeared to Abraham and said, get thee up, Abraham got up. There's a lot of people that didn't. His father Nahor was a believer and heard that call and came part way and then faded out, didn't come all the way to the land, got stuck up there in Haran where Jacob is now going.

Jacob responds, and this is the thing, he comes from a dysfunctional family, there's a lot of baggage, there's a lot of screwed up relationships, a lot of bad blood, a lot of lost opportunities, a lot of just plain weirdness. You know, that's not something you find in the commentary, Isaac was weird. But if you read these chats, it's just a weird, I don't know any other way to describe it.

The more I look at it, the weirder it gets. And it's a wonderful thing to me that it doesn't matter. In God's planet, in God's economy, the thing that counts is when God comes and speaks, what do you say? What do you do? Isaac, with all of his bizarreness, when the call came, he responded.

He expresses faith. He messes up for years and years. Isaac, I'm going to get to Jacob, I'm talking about Isaac, has to wake up on his virtual deathbed before he remembers what the promise is all about.

But he comes around. So now here's Jacob. Jacob has done a lot of strange things, but now on this, and you'll notice that it isn't until he gets out from under his parents' roof that this visit comes.

The first night he's away from the house, it is as though that was holding him back. And yet, he might have thought, well this is the worst thing that could have happened to me. I got the birthright, got the inheritance and everything, now I've got to leave.

I can't enjoy any of it. But in losing, Hovi Lister has a gospel song that he sang, I lost it all to find Christ. It took getting away from all of the stuff that I thought was important before I could really see what life with God was all about.

And it seems to be that way with Jacob. This is the advantage of taking time to meditate, of setting aside time. We set aside time to study, and that's a wonderful thing.

We set aside time to gather and to take in the word of God. And we follow in a tradition of strong teaching churches that have rightly emphasized that very necessary function. But one thing that has perhaps not been as much emphasized as it needs to be is that's part of it.

But it's kind of like if you sit down and eat a big meal, and then you immediately get up and try to run or do a lot of exercise, and you don't get the chance to digest it, you wind up having indigestion. And it's a painful and uncomfortable thing. When we have the word of God in our souls, and some of us have heard hundreds and perhaps thousands of hours of Bible teaching, there ought to be something in our souls that without a Bible, without a notebook, maybe we left it on the chair waiting for the next Bible class, there ought to be something in our soul to spend time in reflection.

To take time, and it's the same as Jacob's situation here, to get away from the material side of life. Jacob doesn't get this talk from God until he gets away from all the stuff he's been concentrating on. He's been angling to get the flocks and herds away from his brother.

He's been angling to get the blessing away from Esau. He's been angling to overcome his father's bias and his father's favoritism. He's been under the, it seems like almost mesmerizing influence of his very powerful personality, Rebecca, his mother.

And it's when he's away from that, when he's out by himself at night, that God can speak. Jesus used to get up in the middle of the night to go off by himself to pray. Even when he was just with a few disciples, he would get away from them and go off by himself and commune with his father.

This is a very under-emphasized aspect of our life as believers, and it needs to happen. We're not going to be able to take advantage of the opportunities that God gives us if we, in addition to taking in the Word of God, don't spend time reflecting on it, incorporating it into our thinking. I am embarrassed about the number of wonderful lessons of Bible teaching and the wonderful things that I've seen in the Word of God, but I had so much stuff going on and it blew on by.

I'll stumble across notes later, and I look at these notes and I say, wow, I don't remember this, and this answers a question for me. I understand something here. If I had taken the time to absorb it and really make it a part of my thinking, what happened to me that I didn't do that? Well, I know exactly what happened.

I was caught up in the fast pace of life and heard it, wrote it down, stuck the notes someplace and blew right on. A few weeks later, it was not a part of the resources in my

soul. There are people who have not been a part of a strong teaching tradition or haven't had a strong teaching church or haven't been able to find a real in-depth study of the Word of God anywhere, but they have gleaned essential things from Scripture and have incorporated it into their soul.

They may be sitting in a church that we would happily drive right by because we say, well, they're not learning anything there, but people who have taken the things that they have gleaned and are putting them into practice day by day by day are stacking up barrel after barrel of eternal fruit while we sometimes can study deeply and learn a lot and stack up notebook after notebook. If we're not incorporating it into our soul, if it isn't driving us by way of motivation and hope and faith and working itself out in love, all of that teaching might as well have been a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. It has to make a difference and it would be better to skip Bible class and think about the last one and make sure that it sunk in and that we extracted the nourishment from it than to keep going to Bible class night after night.

All of us, I think, have been in churches or know of churches where they might have five, six, seven Bible classes a week and there are people who never fail to get there. And having been one of those people, I can tell you sometimes it is better to cut the number of classes in half and spend that time making sure you're absorbing. Jacob has learned a lot in his household.

He knows the history. He knows the promises to Abraham and so forth. God affirms them here.

But I want you to notice Jacob's response. Jacob says, this is a holy place. Is it the place that's holy? The narrator here was very careful not to identify the place until afterward.

In fact, it says he came to the place in verse 11. It's got the definite article, which is kind of strange in Hebrew, but it's just a place. He doesn't say he came near the town of Luz or he came near Bethel where his grandfather Abraham had been before.

It purposely leaves it very vague. This construction in Hebrew means it was a certain place. It was someplace.

And a real good translation of this colloquially would be he arrived someplace and stopped for the night. This geographic location is completely insignificant. What counts is he's finally away from the circumstances that have prevented him from connecting in his relationship with God.

He's finally shed that baggage. It took a lot to get him to here, but now he is. And now that he's free of that, God can speak and Jacob can hear.

And it took a lot. And God has been working some evil things together for good for Jacob. But the place doesn't matter.

That's implicit in the narrative. He could have been anywhere, and God would have come and spoken to him. But what is Jacob's response? Jacob says, the Lord is in this place.

I have happened upon a holy place, and I didn't even know it. He didn't walk up here and a voice comes out of the burning bush saying, put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground, did he? He plopped down and rolled up a stone and went to sleep. It was ground like any other.

And we see that Jacob is in the early stages of his advance. He is going to have a long way to go, because he immediately thinks the place is holy. And in Jacob's loins rests all the rest of the nation of Israel.

Doesn't it? Just like Paul will say later on, the whole nation of Israel was worshiping Melchizedek, or actually the author of Hebrews does, because they were in Abraham's loins when he worshiped and shared bread and wine and gave a tenth to Melchizedek. And that implies that the Melchizedekian priesthood is a superior priesthood to the Levitical, because in Abraham's loins were the Levites, and Abraham recognized the priesthood of Melchizedek. In the same way, here's Jacob, and he's sort of carrying the future nation of Israel with him.

And this is the mistake they're going to make generation after generation after generation, confusing the physical for the spiritual, confusing what you can do for what you should be. And when he wakes up, he immediately thinks, I've stumbled onto a holy place. Instead of, I have come to a great place in my thinking.

I have come to a place in my circumstances. God has freed me. God can speak to me.

He thinks it's the place that counts. So he says, this is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven.

Is that the gate of heaven? Do other people who walk by see the gate of heaven there? It's a misapprehension. It's a misunderstanding. It's a flattening, a making mundane something that is higher and greater.

So he takes the rock and anoints the rock with oil and calls the house of God. And then Jacob makes a vow. He says, you know, now that God has made this promise, if he keeps it, God's made me this promise.

He's had it spoken to him twice now in the space of 24 hours. His father Isaac, in that deathbed pronouncement mode, spoke blessing on him. Then with his eyes, so to speak, wide open at the beginning of this chapter, spoke blessing on him.

God has reiterated the blessing to him. And now he says, if God will be with me, if God will keep me in this way that I am going, if God will give me bread to eat and clothing to put on so that I come back to my father's house in peace. He's thinking, you know,

coming back to the possessions and everything he's leaving behind.

Then the Lord shall be my God and the stone which I've set as a pillar shall be God's house. Now, how can a rock be God's house? What's he really saying here? He said, this little coffee table sized stone that I've turned up on end and poured oil on, this really will be God's house. What's he saying? He's saying, well, then my belief that this is a holy place will be justified.

If God makes these promises come true, then I'll know for sure this really is a holy place. This really is God's house. And I'll give you a tenth of everything.

Why does he make this vow? And why does he promise a tenth? The vow is an interesting concept to study in scripture. The only time vows seem to come up anymore are when churches are in the midst of a building drive. And they're interested in people committing to give.

Then you hear a lot of talk about the vow, about keeping your vow. They want you to fill out a faith promise and, you know, get on board with making sure you keep that promise by sending money to the church. This is more of a promise to the church really than a promise to God.

But this is one of the ideas where we get the vow. But is there, in fact, a biblical principle behind this? In fact, there is. Turn with me, for example, to Numbers chapter 30 and verse 2. We find that quite a number of these are Old Testament passages.

Numbers chapter 30 and verse 2. Moses is speaking to the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which the Lord has commanded. If a man makes a vow to the Lord or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

So God says, if you're going to take a vow, you must keep it. It's a command of God. So in a sense, if you make a promise, you have put yourself under the command of God to keep that promise.

Same thing in Deuteronomy 23 and verse 21. Worded in a slightly different way. When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it.

For the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. To make a vow to God and fail to fulfill it is a sin. This is pretty heavy stuff.

You know, people get an extremist and say, oh God, if you get me out of this jam, I will never do X again. Or I will be in church every Sunday. Well, they may in calmer moments say, well, I was an extremist and it doesn't count.

That does not appear to be God's viewpoint. God says, if you make a vow, if you make a promise, you'd better keep it. You're commanded to keep it.

If you fail to keep it, it is a sin to you. You say, well, what if I promised something rash? Well, people have promised something rash, haven't they? Remember in Judges chapter 11 and verse 39, when Jephthah really wanted to win a battle, and he made a promise to the Lord. You go back to this entire chapter, and Judges is occupied with the story of Jephthah.

But you get to verse 29. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah. He passed through Gilead and Manasseh and Mizpah.

Verse 30, Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, If you will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering. Now, there isn't any getting around it. This is the word olah, and it means whole burnt offering.

There have been people that have tried to soften this and say, well, it's a dedication. She spent the rest of her life as a virgin dedicated to the temple or something. Maybe.

All I know is when you find this word used back in the beginning chapters of Leviticus, it means whole burnt offering. And that's kind of a rough way to take the passage, but I'll be happy to find out that that's not what he had to do. I think that would just be an awful thing.

But it's sort of a rash promise to make, isn't it? But God takes promises seriously. When Jephthah came to his house, verse 34 of Judges 11, there was his daughter coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing. She was his only child.

Beside her, he had neither son nor daughter. It came to pass when he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, Alas, my daughter, you have brought me very low. You are among those who trouble me, for I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot go back on it.

She said, My father, if you have given your word to the Lord, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, because the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the people of Ammon. She said to her father, Let this thing be done for me. Let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I. He said, Go.

He sent her away for two months. She went with her friends, bewailed her virginity on the mountains. And it was so, at the end of two months, she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her, which he had vowed.

She knew no man, and it became a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went

four days each year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite. I seriously doubt that they would have lamented her if she had just had to go live at the temple. I think he carried this out, and that's an awful thing, but she understood and he understood that when you make a promise to the Lord, you keep it, no matter what.

It's a powerful thing. But God is faithful and keeps his promises, doesn't he? Both good and bad. If he promises blessing, he blesses.

If he promises discipline, if he promises judgment, you can be sure it will come. There are people who think that at the end of time, when you have the judgment that takes place for unbelievers, that somehow there will be some mitigation, or how can a merciful God actually consign people to a burning lake of fire forever and ever? All I know is God takes promises seriously, and what God has said, the destruction of the wicked is every bit as certain or uncertain as our salvation. If the destruction of the wicked is not certain, neither is your salvation.

They are founded on the same integrity. They are founded on the same level of dedication to promise. So, to take a vow is not a light thing.

To speak an oath is not a light thing. You get the echo of this in the deathbed oracles that are spoken by the patriarchs. That's why Esau is so upset.

That's why Jacob is so determined, and Rebecca is so determined, because when these things are spoken, something that's spoken, that's how it is. We've really lost our respect for what is said. We say we'll be somewhere at a certain time, or we say we will do something, and it may or may not take place.

And, of course, there's an understanding, and I'm not saying that we have to all slay ourselves if we are a few minutes late or whatever, but the point is the old-fashioned notion that your word is your bond and that you don't have to say, I promise, if you say something, it's as good as a promise. If you commit to something, that's it. It is graven in stone.

This is the biblical view. That's a truth that we can all meditate on, that when you say something, that's how it's going to be. How easy it would be for Jephthah to say, well, surely God can't expect me.

God knows that I could never have foreseen. There's a thousand rationalizations when it's your only child. It's the entire future.

The reason she's bewailing her virginity is that's the end of Jephthah's line. There are no sons and grandsons and great-grandsons of Jephthah in any form because his only child perished as a casualty of a rash vow. But regardless of how rash it was, regardless of how wrong it was, apparently it is more important to keep that vow than to break it.

So a vow is a serious thing. There are passages throughout the Scriptures. You have 1 Samuel 14.26. This is the episode when we went through 1 Samuel.

Remember when Saul was pursuing the enemy in Jonathan and Saul gave out an edict and said no one will eat any food until we have totally whipped the enemy. And Jonathan didn't hear his father say that. And as they were pursuing, everybody was faint with hunger because it was a dumb thing to say.

It's just dumb when you're in the middle of a battle to deny people any rations until they've won the victory. And so people fought and fought and grew weary and grew faint. Jonathan didn't know there was any restriction.

He happened upon a honeycomb where he dipped his hand in and got a mouthful of honey and went on hewing and hacking. But because he ate that honey, he was under the penalty of his father's vow. And we've been through that fascinating section in 1 Samuel 14 where Saul is incensed.

He has heard that somebody broke the rule, but he doesn't know who. So he says, bring the priest and let's cast lots. We'll find out where the sin is in Israel.

I'm going to find this miscreant and put him to death. And so they keep casting the lots and it comes to the tribe of Benjamin and it comes to the clan and it comes to the family and it comes down. And the last lot that's cast is either Saul or Jonathan.

And they don't cast any more lots because Jonathan says, well, I ate some honey. But who is really in the wrong? If the lots had been cast one more time, who would have been designated as the one implementing evil in Israel? But Saul in his hot-headed fashion is ready to slay his son and they have to actually hold him back because of a rash vow. You get down to the Psalms.

There are several places in the Psalms. We don't have time to turn there, but you might make a note of Psalm 50, verse 14. Offer to God thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High.

Psalm 65, verse 1. Praise is awaiting you, O God in Zion, and to you the vow shall be performed. Psalm 76, verse 11. Make vows to the Lord your God and pay them.

Let all who are around him bring presents to him who ought to be feared. Psalm 116, verse 14. I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all his people.

Proverbs 20, verse 25. It is a snare for a man to devote rashly something as holy, and afterward to reconsider his vows. Ecclesiastes 5, verse 4. When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it, for he has no pleasure in fools.

Pay what you have vowed. Isaiah 19, verse 21. The Lord will be known to Egypt, and the

Egyptians will know the Lord in that day and will make sacrifice and offering.

Yes, they will make a vow to the Lord and perform it. Malachi 1, verse 14. Remember that sequence of condemnations in Malachi? When God says, you have profaned my sacrifices, you have profaned my altar, and they say, in what way have we messed up the sacrifice in the altar? Malachi 1, verse 14.

Cursed be the deceiver who has in his flock a male and takes a vow, but sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great king, says the Lord of hosts, and my name is to be feared among the nations. To act as though you are bringing an unblemished lamb and actually be bringing a blemished is the same mistake Ananias and Sapphira make over in Acts.

Matthew 5, verse 33. The Lord Jesus Christ speaking. Again, you have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.

And he goes on to talk about the fact that your words should be your bond in any area. So, it is my belief that we should be careful about making promises to the Lord. We need to know whereof we speak and not be inadvertently putting the Lord to the test.

Not be vowing rashly because if we make a promise, it should be kept. Jacob makes a promise to the Lord. And that promise is that he will give a tenth to the Lord.

What does this mean to give it to the Lord? Is he going to put it on the big escalator that he saw in his vision and have it just piped up to God? How can you give something to God? Everything belongs to God. Anything Jacob gets is going to come from God. So, what does he mean when he says, a tenth of all that I acquire, I will give to the Lord.

How did he arrive at this fraction of a tenth? Excuse me. When's the last time... Is there any precedent for this? Is there any precedent for a tithe? There is. I mentioned it earlier.

Abraham and Melchizedek. The spoils that came from the great victory that God gave to Abraham, Abraham gave a tenth of all of that to Melchizedek, didn't he? So, Jacob says, there will be a house of God at this place and of all that you give me, I will surely give a tenth to you. So, Jacob is sort of promising that there's going to be a sanctuary and that it will be supported with a tenth portion of his income, it would seem to me.

Unless you think that a rock can be a house, he's setting it up as a pillar and saying, this is going to be the spot where the house of God will be. This rock which I have set up shall be God's house. He says in one sense it already is.

This is Beitel. But if I return, then I will make this a house of God and I will give a tenth to you. Actually, the precedent is the tenth part goes to the priest.

The tenth part went to Melchizedek. But this also tells us that Jacob is familiar with his

own family history. Jacob knows that a tenth is, at least in his family, the traditional portion of the spoils, of the bounty that God gives by way of increase.

We've talked about the importance of keeping a vow and I don't see anywhere where that is revoked in Scripture, where we can just make rash promises to each other or to God and not have any compunctions about keeping them. What about the tenth? Tithing has been an issue in some denominations and some churches and there are people today who feel obligated to give a tenth. I will say this.

If you decide in your heart that you want to give God a tenth, if you commit yourself to giving God a tenth, you should. And you should keep on and not let up. If that is your vow, if that is your spoken or unspoken arrangement with the Lord, there's nothing intrinsically wrong with that.

But if you make that your commitment, it's like a vow. It needs to be something that you stick with through thick and thin and you don't decide that when the economic chips are down, you're going to let up. And I believe that those people who choose to give a tenth, I think God blesses them and God preserves them financially and enables them to so do.

It is not a command. It is not a requirement. In the same way that the freewill offerings, that the thanksgiving offerings in Israel were not required, it was an opportunity.

And if you feel that that is an area where God has blessed and where God may be able to use that tenth, maybe God blesses you financially and that's one of your areas of contribution, one of the ways that you can build up the body is God is using you as a channel for financial support. That's great. There's not a thing in the world wrong.

People that choose to tithe, God bless them. And if they're faithful and if they're doing it for the right reasons, they're not expecting that God is going to pay them back tit for tat. You get the idea here with Jacob that he says, well, if God will keep his end of the bargain, I'll keep mine.

He doesn't just say, I have seen God in this place. Behold, this shall be the house of God and from now on, I will give a tenth of everything that I receive to the Lord. He doesn't just make that commitment, does he? He says if, if everything God has just said is true, he has just had a vision from God.

He's just seen God standing at the gate of heaven at the top of the ladder and Jacob is saying if. This implies to me that Jacob, as all of us do, has got a ways to go. He doesn't just take this at face value.

He doesn't just say, God is my God. This is the house of God. I'm going to give a tenth of everything I ever get to the Lord.

He says if. And there's about six if clauses here. If all six conditions are fulfilled, this will

be the house of God and I'll give a tenth.

And you get the idea this is the same thing that's going to haunt Israel now through the generations. And it's almost the reverse. I'll give my tenth and I'm going to be expecting God to be with me.

I'm going to expect God to bless. Hey God, where's your end of the deal? Did you see that tenth I put in last month? Did you see that check I dropped in the plate? Did you see that contribution I mailed to the missionary? When this begins to creep into our thinking, we have fallen wide of the mark. It can be a wonderful thing.

It's like a lot of other forms of service. It's like a lot of other things in the Christian life. This can be a great thing.

A vow or a tithe can be a wonderful thing if you do it for the right reasons, if it is a part of your relationship with God, if it's meaningful to you for its own sake and not with any expectation that God is somehow now obligated because you've made a promise and kept it. Now God is sort of tit for tat and we're kind of cosigners on a contract type of thing. If it's a free will obligation that we place on ourselves, whether it's a vow and or a tithe.

A tithe is a kind of vow. It needs to be done freely, cheerfully. It can be a wonderful thing.

There are no rocks to be thrown at those who tithe and do it for the right reasons. There will be a pile of stones on those who do it for the wrong reasons and think that they can somehow create an expectation from God that surely God is going to honor me because look at what I have done. It should be a response to grace, not a fishing line into the pond of grace.

I think it takes maturity. I'm not sure Jacob here has that viewpoint. It's a big qualifier.

God, if you do these six or seven things, I'll give you a tenth. So we already see some foreshadowing here and some warning signals. This book is in the canon for Israel.

Moses hands it to them. They start their national life with these stories in their hands and there's a reason. It's a warning.

It can be a great thing if it's done for the right reasons. All of our opportunities, all of our commitments that we make, can be great if they're done for the right reasons. Our commitment to attend Bible class and to seek out the teaching of the Word of God can be a wonderful thing as long as we always do it for the right reasons.

It's easy for people to fall into the trap and say surely God has seen my consistency. I move heaven and earth. I go when I'm sick.

I do whatever. I'm always there. That's got to count for something.

That's the kind of thinking we need to avoid and that's the kind of thinking that this passage warns us about. We're going to see that Jacob is going to spend about 20 years learning before this really comes to pass. We're going to need to stop here.

We'll resume next time and begin at chapter 29. Let's close in prayer. Father, we thank you for the privileges, the opportunities that you bring our way.

We pray that we will take the time, be given the time and the opportunity to reflect, to be careful, to think and act and commit ourselves in a way that is pleasing in your sight and glorifying to our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray it in his name. Amen.