

99-11-28a

Let's continue our worship this morning with our Scripture reading, which comes from Psalm 33. We had Thanksgiving dinner this past week, and we looked at this psalm right before our meal, and I really, it's one of my favorite psalms, and I thought, well, I'll just get double mileage out of it this week. I'm going to read it again for our Scripture reading.

So, many wonderful thoughts contained therein, and we don't stop being thankful to God just because Thanksgiving is over and the Christmas season is upon us, although sometimes I am tempted. It's amazing, we spend one twelfth of the year, or more now, now they start putting up the Christmas lights and decorations and putting on the sails and everything, even before Thanksgiving. But, you figure, lately they've been spending at least an entire month out of the year on nothing but Christmas, and because of the, it's probably become obvious and trite to say how much it's been, has lost its original significance.

But, we have many things to be thankful for in this season of the year, all the way through November and December is one of the times when we do at least make an attempt to remember all of the wonderful things that God has done for us through the Lord Jesus Christ. Psalm 33 reminds us of God's sovereignty, of His provision, just as we sing in the doxology that comes from Psalm 100. There are similar themes noted there.

It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. That's the section of the doxology, the verse that we sang this morning.

Psalm 33 is a wonderful psalm that reminds us of who we are and why we're here. Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, for praise from the upright is beautiful. Praise the Lord with the harp, make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings.

Sing to Him a new song, play skillfully with a shout of joy. This reminds me of Dan. Dan plays skillfully and we shout for joy.

For the word of the Lord is right, and all His work is done in truth. He loves righteousness and justice. The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap. He lays up the deep in storehouses.

Let all the earth fear the Lord. Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke and it was done.

He commanded and it stood fast. The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing. He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect.

The counsel of the Lord stands forever. The plans of His heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.

The people He has chosen as His own inheritance. The Lord looks from heaven. He sees all the sons of men.

From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashions their hearts individually. He considers all their works.

No king is saved by the multitude of an army. A mighty man is not delivered by great strength. A horse is a vain hope for safety.

Neither shall it deliver any by its great strength. Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him. On those who hope in His mercy.

To deliver their soul from death and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waits for the Lord. He is our help and our shield.

For our heart shall rejoice in Him because we have trusted in His holy name. Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us just as we hope in You. May God add His blessing to the reading and the hearing of His word this morning.

Let's turn back now to Genesis chapter 31. Genesis chapter 31. We'll see that the attitude of trust and confidence in God because of His sovereign power is an issue for Jacob at this point in his career.

We know that he has fled from the household of Laban. He picked the busiest time of the year when Laban and all of his men would be busy from dawn till dusk. And basically sculpted away with his tail between his legs.

Taking his family and his earnings with him. The flocks and herds that he has built up over the previous six years. Laban overtook Jacob in verse 25 of chapter 31.

Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountains. Laban with his brethren pitched in the mountains of Gilead. We saw that this was potential for great conflict.

The men confront one another. Laban brings the accusation against Jacob that he's a kidnapper and a thief. Jacob answers in verse 31, I was afraid.

That's why I fled. I thought you would take your daughters from me by force. But I didn't take your teraphim.

We spent last Sunday looking at this idea of the theft of the teraphim. What did the teraphim mean that Rachel would take them? It certainly is one of the main reasons that Laban is so hot in pursuit of Jacob. Not only because of the unannounced departure with his daughters and his grandchildren.

But Laban's teraphim are gone. We went over to judges and other places and looked at the significance of the teraphim in establishing a new household. The Danites steal a priest and steal the teraphim that a man makes.

They had never really settled down as a tribe and claimed any territory. When they want to set themselves up as an independent tribe, they figure they need a priest, they need the teraphim. This seems to be somehow related to leadership, to divining the future, and determining purposes and so on.

Laban apparently has such great store by these household idols, these household gods, which are, of course, made of stone, probably overlaid with gold or silver. Rachel takes them. Why would she do this? Because the riddle that we know about Rachel, she is sort of a two-dimensional character in these stories.

She is the object of Jacob's affection. She creates an additional seven years of work, the deception that Laban perpetrates in substituting Leah for Rachel. But we don't hear a whole lot of what goes on in Rachel's heart.

We hear her crying out to her husband, Jacob, give me children or I die. We hear her agreeing with her sister that they have nothing by way of inheritance or possessions from their father Laban, that he's sold them for money and spent the money. And you get the idea in looking at Rachel that she puts great stock in her son Joseph.

She wanted badly to have a child. You remember the episode of the mandrakes, where she trades a night with Jacob to her sister in exchange for these mandrakes, which were thought to be aphrodisiac and fertility-inducing food substance. She really, really wants a child of her own.

Even after she's gotten the ones by her handmaid, she's not content. Now she has Joseph. How old is he now? He's six or seven years old, isn't he? Because it was at his birth that Jacob said to Laban, let me leave and go back to my land.

Then they worked out the bargain where he would work six more years for the flocks and herds. We had the striped and the spotted and so on. So he's six or seven years old.

Rachel evidently has ambitions because her son is the eleventh born. He has no hope of really coming into much in Jacob's will. There's ten other brothers ahead of him that are going to be dividing up inheritance and blessing and so forth.

So it seems at least possible that she has ideas of letting Joseph strike out on his own, hooking himself up with the Teraphim and establishing his own household, just like the Danites will do later on down there in Judges, as we saw last week. So she is going to make it happen. You see her just working, doing things the hard way, all the way through these stories.

But when Laban catches up and she hides the Teraphim, Jacob is unaware that he is in fact guilty of this theft. As the responsible head of the household, even though he is unaware, he bears responsibility for the action of his wife, his wives actually, his entire family. He's the head of the household.

He's responsible. We're going to see that a covenant is going to be cut between Laban and Jacob, that Laban basically runs out of steam. He can't really argue with the protestations of Jacob that begin in verse 36 when he says, What is my trespass? What is my sin that you so hotly pursued me? Although you have searched all my things, what part of your household things have you found? Set it here before my brethren and your brethren, that we may judge between us both.

And so Jacob declares his righteousness. And in fact, there is guilt in the camp. The Teraphim are present, but Rachel has hidden them by sitting on them and telling her father, Well, I can't rise.

The monthly time of disaccommodation is upon me. And so she's sitting on her camel saddle and the Teraphim are inside. It's sort of interesting, just as an aside here, when it talks about Laban searching the camp.

In verse 33, he goes through all the different tents and then he comes to Rachel. And in verse 34, Rachel had taken the household idols, put them in the camel saddle and sat on them. Laban searched all about the tent, but did not find them.

That word for search there in verse 34 is the very same word that was used back here in the blessing scene between Isaac and Jacob. Remember when Rebecca strapped the skins of the freshly killed sacrifice on her son so that he would be hairy like Esau? And Isaac says, Come near my son that I may feel you. Well, that word for feel and the word for search is exactly the same.

This is a link that reminds us of a chiastic structure that exists in this whole Jacob cycle. And we'll explore that here as soon as we finish looking at the covenant. But just as Isaac doesn't find the truth when he feels about on Jacob, Laban feels about for his teraphim and doesn't find them.

And there's an irony there that is going to be significant. As a result, however, Jacob is able to protest that he is innocent, that there's no guilt with him. And he goes on to voice the same complaints that he mentioned to his wives in the preceding section there in chapter 31 when he tells them that it's time to leave.

He says, That which was torn by beasts, in verse 39 of chapter 31, I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, whether stolen by day or stolen by night.

But there I was, and in the day the drought consumed me, the frost by night, sleep

departed from my eyes. I've been in your house twenty years. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times.

Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night. This is a great advance in the thinking of Jacob.

Remember what he was relying on and how he thought he was going to obtain his future and his fortune when he lived with his father Isaac? He thought the only way to get it was to big deal his brother out of it, to deceive his father out of it. Now he says, It is because of the God of Abraham, the fear of Isaac, who is with me. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands and He rebuked you.

He has rewarded me in spite of you. We were coming back down in the van last night listening to the statesman sing, You can't stop God from blessing me. And this was sort of Jacob's song to sing at this point.

Despite your efforts, you've changed my wages ten times, but God has seen my affliction, He's seen the labor of my hands and has blessed me and rebuked you in the process. Laban puts up kind of a weak protestation. He says, All of this stuff is mine.

Which is sort of what Jacob says. You'll notice in verse 41, he doesn't say, I served you 14 years for my two wives and six years for my flock. He says, I served for your daughters and your flock.

Because these things did in fact come from Laban. And God has taken it away from Laban and given it to Jacob. So Laban says, Well, this is all my stuff.

You're right. But he says, What can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne? So in verse 44, Laban speaks and says, Now therefore come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me. So he says, Let's come to a resolution here.

It's very interesting because from here through the end of the chapter, Jacob is only going to say two words. Laban is going to do all of the talking. Jacob took up a stone and set it up as a pillar.

Then Jacob said to his brethren, Gather stones. Two words in Hebrew, just like it is in English. And we aren't going to hear Jacob speak again for the whole rest of the chapter.

It's as though he's said his piece to Laban and he doesn't have any more to say to him. Laban is just going to froth and wax on and on about all these things. Jacob says, Fine, set up the stone.

And he's done. He's finished talking. So they took the stones and made a heap and they ate there on the heap.

This is one of these things where, just like in the creation story and other places we've seen in Hebrew literature, it tells you the short version of what's going to happen. And then we're going to go back and get the details. Laban called it Yegar Sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galid.

This is interesting because it reminds us that there are two different languages in use here. Living up in Paddan Aram, where Laban does, the language up there is Aramaic. Aramaic is a cousin language to Hebrew, which is the native language of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It is, in fact, the native language. Of course, Laban is from the same family. But in living in Paddan Aram his whole life, he has adopted the language of his surroundings.

So he now speaks Aramaic. Jacob has, of course, learned Aramaic. He's bilingual.

He can translate and communicate with Laban. It reminds me, when I had to go to Lebanon, I had a team of five enlisted men with me. Back in 1983, we went over there to work with howitzers that had been sold to the Lebanese army.

They needed someone to teach the Lebanese. Well, they needed to learn a whole lot of things. Anyway, we went there to teach them gunnery and how to do crew maintenance on the howitzers.

Four of the five enlisted army soldiers that went with me, they were NCOs, were Spanish speaking. They were English as a second language types, and they would often talk to each other in Spanish. I had a smattering of Spanish, and I could sort of understand what they were saying.

But we had Hernandez and Garcia and this kind of thing. They were right at home with that. When we got to Italy, we took a day and spent a day in Rome on our way back because they give you an R&R day after you've been in a stressful environment, which we certainly had been.

So we took a day in Rome, and we actually were able to go see the Colosseum and do a whirlwind tour and see the Parthenon. That's not the Parthenon either, that's in Athens. But the thing that says Sonatas Populusque Romanis, there's something there that I'd always wanted to see.

I'd seen pictures of it, and it was there. So anyway, we were in Rome. After you've seen about ten minutes' worth of ruins, it all starts looking the same.

I can hardly even separate my memories of Athens and Rome because it's all just piles of

broken down, decaying marble and rock and so forth. My whole point in digressing to this length is that while we were in Rome, we had to talk to people that only spoke Italian. But Spanish and Italian are close enough that Sergeant First Class Hernandez and Staff Sergeant Garcia were able to communicate pretty well.

They did all the negotiations with the taxi drivers and the hotel people and the guide that was going to take us around didn't speak English. We got the shoestring budget tour of Rome, show us everything you can show us in six hours, and the guy didn't speak any English. He was basically a cab driver.

But we got all the translation back and forth because Spanish and Italian are close enough that one can communicate to the other if you speak it. This is sort of the case. It's about the same distance between Aramaic and Hebrew.

In fact, there are several chapters in the Bible, in the book of Ezra, in the book of Daniel. There are about five chapters in Daniel that are all in Aramaic. There are about two chapters in Ezra and a couple of other scattered passages.

This is one of them. There's a verse in Jeremiah. There's a verse here in Genesis that records some Aramaic.

This is what we have going on here. Laban calls it Yegar Sahadutha. Jacob calls it Galid.

They mean exactly the same thing, heap of witness. This is the derivation of the name for this entire region, which is called Gilead, which is pretty much the entire region east of the Jordan River, going all the way up to the Jabbok River and then way down south to the Dead Sea. This entire region is called Gilead.

Why is this important? If you look at this, wouldn't it have been easy? Laban pursued Jacob. They had this conversation. They air out their grievances and come to a resolution.

Let there be a covenant. So they made a covenant that day and set up a stone and called it Gilead and Yegar Sahadutha. And Laban returned to his own land.

It would make perfect sense. It is somewhat surprising when you look at the space that is dedicated to this. We start in verse 44, go all the way down to verse 55, belaboring over this covenant.

And so we ask ourselves the question, why does God allocate the space in the inspired scriptures, these 11 verses, talking about this covenant? It just goes on and on and on. Scholars say, well, this is the conflation. There were actually two accounts and the editor of Genesis has put them together and that's how they explain all of this excess verbiage and repetition and so on that goes on in here.

But let's read this. Jacob, his last words are gather stones. They took the stones, they made a heap and they ate there on the heap.

Laban called it one thing, Jacob called it Gilead. Laban said, this heap is a witness between you and me this day. Therefore its name was called Gilead, also Mizpah.

Because he said, may the Lord watch between you and me when we are absent from one another. If you afflict my daughters or if you take other wives besides my daughters, although no man is with us, see, God is witness between you and me. Laban is real big on witnesses, isn't he? Look back at verse 43.

He says, these are my daughters, these are my children, this, that and the other. So 44, come let us make a covenant you and I and let it be a witness between you and me. So the covenant is witness number one.

We're going to make a covenant and that's going to be a witness. Then he says, Jacob takes the stone and sets it up as a pillar. So Laban calls it heap of witness.

So now the rock is a witness. First of all in 45, Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. Now a pillar and a heap are two different things.

So here's a pillar. Then Jacob said, gather stones. So they gathered stones.

So one of these, there's two vertical objects here. One is a single stone set up on end, just like Jacob did at Bethel. And that's a pillar of witness.

Then Jacob gathered stones and they made a heap and they ate there at the heap. Laban names it, Jacob names it. And Laban says in 48, this heap is a witness between you and me this day.

And then Laban goes on and on. May the Lord watch between you and me when we are absent from one another. If you inflict, God is my witness.

God is the witness between you and me. Then Laban says to Jacob in 51, here is, so we've got three witnesses, don't we? The covenant is a witness, the pillar is a witness, the heap is a witness. Why are they doing this? Why is Laban doing this in particular? Heap, this wasn't Jacob's idea, this was Laban's idea.

Laban says in 51, here is this heap and here is this pillar, which I have placed between you and me. He's kind of taking something on to himself. Looks to me like Jacob set up the pillar and Jacob's servants gathered the stones.

But Laban says, well, this was my idea. So, if it's my idea, I've done it. Here's this heap, here's this pillar, which I have placed between you and me.

We're separate now. We're splitting the blanket. And there's this set of witnesses

between us.

This heap is a witness and this pillar is a witness that I will not pass beyond this heap to you and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me for harm. The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us. Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac.

We don't have a quote, but obviously Jacob spoke at this point and said, fine, I agree. He can't put his hand on a Bible or a stack of Bibles because they don't have any such thing. So, they swear by the witness.

The God of Abraham, the fear of his father Isaac, he takes his oath in the name of God. I swear by the fear of Isaac. I will respect this boundary between us.

Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain and called his brethren to eat bread. And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain. So, they've sanctified, they've partaken together of a meal.

This puts us in mind of what happens up on Mount Sinai. Remember when the elders are invited up and they eat a meal in the presence of God? Early in the morning, Laban arose and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place.

That ends the chapter. Why all of these stones? Why all of these witnesses? Well, first of all, Laban is a big one for thinking that there's more than meets the eye in stones. He's the one with the teraphim, right? He thinks the teraphim have got some sort of divine power.

You get the idea that people that engaged in idolatry didn't actually think that the rock itself was a God. They thought that the rock was a place where the God would dwell or where the God would communicate. And that this was a place of contact, a way of bringing the invisible into the visible world.

And, of course, it was distressing to them if something happened to this contact point, this gateway to the unseen world of God or the gods. You remember when doing the image of Dagon, the Philistines take the Ark of the Covenant and put it in their temple and then the image of Dagon falls and his hands break off on the threshold and ever after the Philistines wouldn't step on the threshold because it's a pretty powerful threshold. It broke the hands off of Dagon.

Anyway, Laban sets great store by rocks and inanimate objects as contact points with the unknown divine realms. And he is apparently polytheistic. He recognizes the God of Nahor, the God of Abraham.

But in verse 53 when he says, The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of

their father judge between us. You know that the word God is Elohim, which is a plural. But it typically takes a singular verb.

And that's how we know that it's a plural of majesty. But here in verse 53, Laban uses the plural verb for judge. So basically he's saying, The gods of Abraham, Nahor, and their father judge.

Let them judge between us. And he treats them as slightly different gods. What's he saying? He's saying, well, you just took one of the gods of our fathers.

You took the God of Abraham. But he says something about the fact that apparently Nahor's God was slightly different. That there's more than one.

And this is a little insight into his use of the teraphim and his belief that these were important and so on. But Jacob, of course, is worshiping the fear of Isaac. He swears by one God alone.

Then he offers a sacrifice to God on the mountain. They eat bread, they eat a meal in consecration of this occasion. But all of this idea of witness.

Why is Laban so concerned about this? Why does he need a witness? Why is he worried about Jacob ever coming back across the line? He sees that the power is with Jacob. God prospers Jacob in whatever he does. And that power creates fear in Laban.

Laban has been able to keep Jacob under his thumb. He's been able to sort of get a blessing by association and to benefit. But he's lost all of his leverage now.

He had the leverage of his daughters. He eventually lost that over 14 years. He had the leverage of possessions.

But now Jacob has become self-sufficient, self-sustaining. And it seems that whatever he does prospers. And he is out from under any leverage or any control that Laban has.

And this makes him fearful. And he wants a witness. He wants a marker.

He wants the boundaries set. He thinks that he's going to come back and cross over for evil. So the heap and the witness will stand there.

And he invests these rocks and this pillar with a divine watchfulness. He says, we'll set these up and God will judge. God will watch from this point.

It's almost as though God is up in the pillar or up on the heap and can see north to where Laban lives and can see south to where Jacob lives, south and west. And will monitor their activities so that neither one can cross. Well, why would Laban be concerned about binding himself to an oath that he won't harm Jacob? He's not concerned about that.

He's afraid that Jacob is going to come back and take the rest of what he has. He feels a loss of power and a loss of security. His teraphim are gone.

His daughters are gone. A good portion of his flock is gone. He sees that the lesser has become the greater.

It's like a well bucket. When you've got a bucket on each end of the well rope, if you raise one bucket, the other one sinks. You find this as a theme in literature, that one character will start out being dominant and strong and the other one is weak and submissive.

Over the course of the story, the well buckets change positions and one rises as the other falls. Laban senses this and it puts him in fear. So he's putting his confidence in the promise.

And he makes Jacob swear by the God of his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham. But this is belabored here over the course of 11 verses. What does it say about Jacob? Jacob has been sojourning in a foreign land for 20 years.

He's just now about to set foot back in the land of promise. He has been associated with the Aramean. He's been associated with Laban of Paddan Aram.

God has blessed him while he sojourned. But now that he's coming back across this idea of separation, it's instigated, it is initiated by Laban, but it is a binding oath. And Jacob says, this is a good thing.

And he sacrifices to God and he swears by the God of heaven that he will observe this separation. Because when he comes out, it reminds us of what God says to Israel later on. Come out from among them and be ye separate.

Touch not the unclean thing. And there are two, yea, three witnesses. Just like it says in the law of Moses.

In the mouths of two or three witnesses a thing is established. They would sometimes appeal to heaven and earth as witnesses. God, when he could swear by no greater, swore by himself.

All of these are invoked. The covenant is a witness. The pillar is a witness.

The heap is a witness. God himself is a witness. That this boundary of separation will be observed by both sides.

And especially by Jacob. That Jacob will not cross back over and rejoin or in any way come back in contact with Laban. And it's important because when God, it foreshadows what's going to happen in the later history of Israel.

Israel is going to come out of Egypt under the blood. This sacrifice reminds us of the sacrifice that took place on the first Passover. And that separation coming out from Egypt, they're not supposed to go back.

Paul will remind the Galatians that once you have been set free, do not be entangled again in a yoke of bondage. Jacob has been in bondage to Laban for these 20 years. He has been in servitude.

God has used that time. He has molded and shaped the thinking of Jacob over these 20 years. He has blessed him and been with him and fulfilled all of his promises.

But now it's time for a new phase. There's a new calling. Just like Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldees, Jacob has received a call.

He tells his wife, God appeared to me and said, go home. Go to the land. And it's an echo of what happened with Abraham.

And Abraham was to get up out of his kindred and out of his household and go to the land of promise. Jacob is to get out away from Laban, his kinsmen, and go to the land of promise. And this boundary of separation, which is not even the border of the land.

It's further away. It's something Jacob is not to cross again. And so that's the significance of Galid, of Mizpah, of this covenant.

So we come to chapter 32. Jacob went on his way and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, this is God's camp.

And he called the name of the place Mahanaim. And this is really, this would be a better place for the chapter break. Because beginning in verse 3, we have a resumption of the Jacob Esau story.

But really verse 1 and 2 of chapter 32 belong with chapter 31. So Jacob turns, this is the last of his dealings with Laban. And you see him, he turns back toward Paddan Aram and confronts Laban.

He makes a covenant with him. That issue is resolved. He has no unfinished business with Laban.

Now he turns his face back to resume his journey to fulfill what God told him to do. To return to the land of his fathers. As he does so, the angels of God meet him.

There is no record of any conversation. There's no command that's given. This is something that Jacob sees.

And it's quite odd, don't you think? If I walked out here to take a hike down to the park or something. And all of a sudden I saw the angels of God. You would think, well God has

sent these for a purpose.

I need to find out what they have to say. They're messengers. But there's no, apparently no communication.

No verbal communication whatsoever. Jacob sees them and he says, this is God's camp. The word for camp is Machana.

M-A-C-H, which is a hard, it's almost a K. A-N-A-H. Machana. You know what the suffix im means.

That makes something, doubles it. Makes it a plural. So he calls the name of that place Machanaim.

What's that going to mean? It means two camps. Then he's going to start anticipating his meeting with Esau. This is the third time that Jacob has seen something without being given a lot of explanation.

What was the first time? When he was leaving the land. When he was leaving, departing from Rebekah and Isaac and Esau. And he got to Bethel.

He laid his head down on the rock. He had a vision from God. This is the first time he's gotten any information from God.

And what does he see? It's what they call Jacob's ladder. The stair step thing between earth and heaven. And the angels ascending and descending.

And then he gets the promise from God. That God will be with him and keep him and bless him and bring him back to the land. But there's no explanation of the stairway.

Of the ladder. Or the ramp. Or whatever it may have resembled.

The second time was what he explains to his wives. Back in verse 10. At the time when the flocks of thirty-one.

The time when the flocks conceived, I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream. And behold, the rams which leaped upon the flocks were streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted. The angel of the Lord spoke, and he said, lift your eyes now and see.

All the rams which leap on the flocks are streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted. For I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar, where you made a vow to me.

Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family. Doesn't explain the rams and the streaks and speckles and spots, does he? He just says, I'm here, I have seen. It's another affirmation of his presence and his promises.

But the vision of the rams is not explained. Now here, for a third time, he sees the angels of God, and there's no explanation of what he sees. I find this quite fascinating.

This is a first in Genesis, as we've gone through. God has always spoken and explained himself. But here, Jacob sees things that are not explained.

What's the point? The sight itself is supposed to be sufficient communication. It doesn't need explanation. When he sees the angels ascending and descending at the stairway or the ladder, what is this a confirmation of? What does this affirm? That God, in his heaven, is interested in what's going on.

That God is detailing angels to be with Jacob, to accompany him, to watch him, to keep him, to ensure the fulfillment of the promises that God has made to Jacob. But it's an unspoken affirmation. It's a picture that is supposed to communicate.

The second time, you have the rams mounting the flocks, and they're streaked and speckled and spotted. It's a picture that communicates a truth that God is going to bless Jacob, and has blessed Jacob, with those things that are not desirable from a human point of view. The desirable sheep are the pure white ones.

The desirable goats are the dark ones. But the blessing of God to Jacob is going to come in the things that don't seem to make sense on the surface from a human point of view. But that's unspoken.

It's contained in the visual picture. Now for a third time, why do you think God lets Jacob see angels when he's on his way back to the land? It wasn't an accident. It's not like, oops, we forgot to put the invisibility shield down and keep these humans from seeing us.

God does this on purpose. He reveals the angels to Jacob, and there's not a word spoken. Why? Jacob is supposed to remember what he saw on his way out of the land.

That these angels are there for a purpose. That they're fulfilling God's command. That they are ensuring the fulfillment of God's promises for Jacob.

But it's a picture from which he is to draw the conclusions and have the truth affirmed. Well, what does this put us in mind of? What is going to be the nature of God's communication to the nation of Israel? In the form of the Levitical ordinances, the Levitical offerings and sacrifices. They are pictures.

They are visual communications from God that are to speak for themselves. The laying of the hand on the animal. All of the intricacies of the sacrifices and the rituals in the ordinances contained in the Law of Moses for Israel are pictures that don't need words.

You should be able to meditate on that picture and understand what God is saying. So

this idea of speaking through symbols and teaching and reinforcing the truth. Reminding of the faithfulness of God and the fulfillment.

The absolute certainty of the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. This has great precedent. God begins this form of communication with Jacob himself.

And it is a reminder that in looking, God will put these things before his eyes. God will put these things before the eyes of the nation of Israel. And in fact, God puts these things before our eyes and we are to meditate on them and extract the truth.

To have the truth reinforced. To be reminded of the faithfulness of God. The promises of God.

The certainty of the fulfillment of God's covenant promises. To Jacob. To Israel.

And to us. But you have to think. You can't just say, well, looky there, an angel.

How about that? Boy, I never saw a ladder so tall. Never saw a stairway so high. You have to be looking for the meaning.

What does it mean all these speckled and striped and spotted rams and he goats? Boy, never had a dream like that. What did they cook me for dinner last night that gave me that funny? Must have had lima beans or something. Had all those spots on them.

Gave me, no, pinto beans. Yeah, it would have been pinto beans. Probably wouldn't have been able to sleep at all if he'd had lima beans.

They fed him some kind of strange food. You have to think about the picture. You have to look at it and see what the meaning of it is.

This is the initiation of this form of communication that God makes to Jacob. That he's going to use throughout his dealings with the nation of Israel. Supplemented, of course, with verbal communication.

But these are the powerful pictures. These are the memorable things. Will Jacob ever forget what he saw when he laid his head down at Bethel? Will he ever forget the dream of the rams? Will he ever forget seeing these angels in the camps? He names the place after it so that he won't forget.

He sets up a pillar. This is designed to be memorable. It's designed to make an impression that will last.

If he ever forgets the words that are spoken, how can he forget that image, that vision? This is a form of communication that God uses right down to the present day. All of these things were written for our instruction. When we think back, our study in Genesis has been long.

It's going to be a little bit longer. But what will we take away? What will we remember? It's difficult. Everybody acknowledges that when you get into the New Testament and study the epistles, or you get deep down into the theological portions of the Word of God, it's not always easy to remember.

You can go back to a chapter. We did this just a few days ago. Looking back at Romans 9 and 10, it's tough to remember the thread of how everything goes together.

But the pictures, the characters, and the stories, especially in the Old Testament and in the life of Jesus Christ, are so memorable. We want those stories to carry the truth with them, to remind us, just the way God communicates with Jacob, and to learn from it and to draw conclusions from it. We're going to pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we'll see that Jacob does catch the significance of this vision, just as he did the previous two. This is a great model for us. When we meditate on the Word of God, when we think about the stories, hopefully that truth that they represent will be fresh in our minds as well.

But let's pause here and take our break.