



# A Stairway

*God is actively involved in the lives of His people.*

## **GENESIS 28:10-22**

Most parents and grandparents are as actively involved as they can be in the lives of their children and grandchildren. Parents who knew little about soccer become soccer coaches—simply because their child is on the field. Grandparents will happily dance alongside their two-year-olds to fast versions of “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes.” All this because they love their children and grandchildren. How much more is the love of God for His children? How much more does He desire to be involved in their lives?

- What would you include in a list of the ways God is actively involved in the lives of His children?

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# UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

## **GENESIS 28:1-22**

The following is a summary of the book of Genesis so far. Genesis 1-2 reveals God as Creator. He created human beings in His image, with the ability to know, enjoy, and worship Him. Chapter 3 records the sin of Adam and Eve. God held them accountable but also promised He would ultimately deal with the serpent and sin's consequences through the "seed of the woman." This raises a question that pertains to the rest of Scripture: Who is this descendant of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent? In chapter 4, Cain murdered Abel. Eve then gave birth to Seth, and he was the one who would carry on the promise.

By the beginning of Genesis 6, God saw that the wickedness of humanity permeated the earth, with the exception of Noah, a descendant of Seth. In chapters 6-9, God used a flood to destroy every living thing except Noah, his family, and the animals with them on the ark. When Noah exited the ark, God made a covenant with him. Through Noah, the promised seed would come. God blessed Noah's descendants, but they also rebelled against God when they built the tower of Babel (11:1-9). The genealogy at the end of Genesis 11 introduces Abraham and Sarah to the story. Chapter 12 begins the story of Israel's patriarchs, beginning with Abraham. In an everlasting covenant with Abraham, God promised Abraham that He would make him the father of nations, bless him, and use him to be a blessing to all nations through his offspring.

So the story reveals that the descendant of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent would come from Abraham and Sarah. After many challenges, God finally gave them their promised son, Isaac (21:3). Isaac and his wife Rebekah had twins, Esau and Jacob. Their family dynamic was dysfunctional, but God used them to establish Jacob as the chosen seed to carry on the promises that had been made to Abraham (25:21-27:41). God's continued faithfulness to His covenant with Abraham through Jacob is established by the events recorded in 28:10-22.

 **Read Genesis 28:10-22. What do you learn about ways believers should respond to God's involvement in their lives?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## DREAMING (GEN. 28:10-12)

<sup>10</sup> Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. <sup>11</sup> He reached a certain place and spent the night there because the sun had set. He took one of the stones from the place, put it there at his head, and lay down in that place. <sup>12</sup> And he dreamed: A stairway was set on the ground with its top reaching the sky, and God's angels were going up and down on it.

### VERSES 10-11

It is important to read these verses in light of what had just occurred in **Beer-sheba**, the home of Jacob's immediate family. Helped by his mother Rebekah, Jacob deceived his father Isaac into pronouncing the blessing that was normally given to the oldest son on him instead (27:1-29). When Esau realized what Jacob had done, he vowed to kill him as soon as their elderly father Isaac had passed away (27:36-41). Discovering Esau's murderous intentions, Rebekah instructed Jacob to flee to her brother Laban in Haran (27:43). Also, Isaac told Jacob to go find a wife in Haran instead of marrying a Canaanite woman (28:1-5). Jacob obeyed and **went toward Haran**, about a 500-mile journey. *Haran* was the place where the Lord spoke to Abraham and called him to leave his family and go to the land of Canaan (11:31-12:5). Unlike Abraham, who had a sizable company with him when he made the journey, Jacob was making this long, treacherous trek alone.

Jacob arrived at **a certain place**, took **one of the stones** there to use as a pillow, and laid down to spend **the night**. He had no idea what was about to happen to him. However, Moses wrote in a way to tip the reader something unusual was about to happen. Each of the three occurrences of the Hebrew word *place* in verse 11 has the definite article *the* in front of it. This anticipates how "the place" will become highly significant not only for Jacob but for all of his descendants from this point forward. From Jacob's perspective, this place was randomly chosen as a good spot to spend the night. However, what God did here with Jacob was a demonstration of His grace. God often works in places and at times we least expect Him to do so.

## VERSE 12

Human efforts to reach God will always fail. But what Jacob saw in his dream was a **stairway** established by God connecting earth and heaven. This signified God's initiative to communicate with Jacob. On this stairway, **God's angels were going up and down**. The presence of the angels in Jacob's dream recalls Abraham's words to the servant he sent to find a wife for Isaac. Abraham told him that God would send His angel before him and make his trip a success (24:7,40). These angels appear to be an assurance to Jacob that God would protect him and give him a successful journey.

- What significance should we place on dreams?  
What are some ways God speaks to His people today?
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## PROMISED (GEN. 28:13-15)

<sup>13</sup> **The LORD was standing there beside him, saying, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your offspring the land on which you are lying. <sup>14</sup> Your offspring will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out toward the west, the east, the north, and the south. All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. <sup>15</sup> Look, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."**

## VERSE 13

Jacob was isolated and estranged from his family and everything else he had ever known, but he was not alone. **The LORD was standing there beside him**. What's more, the Lord spoke to him. This is the first time God spoke directly to Jacob, and the first thing He said was, **I am the LORD**. These are the same words God used to identify Himself to Abraham when He made His covenant with him (15:7). God would also identify Himself this way to Israel when He established His covenant with the nation and gave them the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:2).

The Lord also identified Himself as **the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac**. By identifying Abraham rather than Isaac as *your father*, the Lord was indicating that all of the covenant

promises He had made to Abraham were now being passed on to Jacob. Later, when God sent Moses to deliver the Israelites from Egypt, God would identify Himself as “the LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex. 3:15).

God placed special emphasis on the promise of **offspring** and **land**. *Offspring* indicates that Jacob would find a wife and have children, and **the land on which you are lying** asserts that the land of Canaan would be his. This is important since in that moment Jacob was fleeing for his life from this land. God’s words to Jacob anticipated a bright future. Hope in the future helps one find strength in the present.

#### VERSE 14

To demonstrate that the promises God had made to Abraham were now passed on to Jacob and his offspring, the wording here echoes what God said to Abraham. God promised that Jacob’s **offspring will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out toward the west, the east, the north, and the south. All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.** Compare those promises with what God had promised Abraham in Genesis 12:3; 13:14-15; and 22:18:

- “I will give you and your offspring forever all the land that you see” (13:15).
- “I will . . . make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore” (22:17).
- “Look north and south, east and west” (13:14).
- “All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (12:3).
- “All the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring” (22:18).

#### VERSE 15

God then told Jacob to **look**. Jacob needed to see that God was with him and would **watch over** him wherever he should go. Jacob’s travels could not outdistance God’s protection. God assured Jacob that He would bring him back to the land of Canaan. He would not abandon Jacob until He had accomplished all that He said He would do.

- God promised to go with Jacob and to watch over him wherever he went. Is there a loved one who needs to be reminded of this promise? (Read Deut. 31:8; Heb. 13:5-6.)
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**God is not One to be trifled with,  
but He is One we can trust.**

### **GATE OF HEAVEN (GEN. 28:16-17)**

<sup>16</sup> When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.” <sup>17</sup> He was afraid and said, “What an awesome place this is! This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven.”

#### **VERSES 16-17**

When Jacob awoke, he was taken aback and said, ***Surely the LORD is in this place.*** How could such an ordinary place be a holy place? Jacob had not realized that God was with him.

At that point, Jacob experienced what biblical writers would call “the fear of the Lord,” a reverential, worshipful awe and adoration of God mixed with a feeling of trepidation. God is not One to be trifled with, but He is One we can trust. Recognizing this to be a holy place, Jacob called it ***the house of God*** and said that it was ***the gate of heaven.***

- In what ways might sensing God’s presence change a person’s perspective?
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#### **KEY DOCTRINE:** *God*

To God we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience.  
(See Exodus 15:11; Psalm 100.)

## THE VOW (GEN. 28:18-22)

<sup>18</sup> Early in the morning Jacob took the stone that was near his head and set it up as a marker. He poured oil on top of it <sup>19</sup> and named the place Bethel, though previously the city was named Luz. <sup>20</sup> Then Jacob made a vow: “If God will be with me and watch over me during this journey I’m making, if he provides me with food to eat and clothing to wear, <sup>21</sup> and if I return safely to my father’s family, then the LORD will be my God. <sup>22</sup> This stone that I have set up as a marker will be God’s house, and I will give to you a tenth of all that you give me.”

### VERSES 18-19

When Jacob woke up the next morning, he **took the stone that was near his head** and **set it up** as a commemorative marker. Pouring **oil on top of it** was to consecrate the pillar to the Lord and establish the place as holy.

Because of everything that had transpired in his dream, Jacob changed the name of the place from its original name **Luz** to **•Bethel**, meaning “house of God.” Bethel would become an important sanctuary and place of worship for the nation of Israel because it was known as a place where people could find access to God. Because it was located on one of the main intersections in the heart of the hill country, Bethel became a religious center in Israel that was second only to Jerusalem. Regrettably, throughout Israel’s history, Bethel often became more of a religious shrine of false worship than a place of authentic worship of the Lord. Amos predicted its destruction (Amos 3:14; 5:5-6), and Hosea referred to it as “Beth-aven,” the “house of wickedness” (Hos. 5:8-9; 10:5).

### VERSES 20-21

Jacob then **made a vow** to God. His vow contained three petitions: (1) God’s protective presence; (2) God’s provision; and (3) Jacob’s safe return home to his family. If God did all He promised, Jacob vowed **then the LORD will be my God**.

It may seem that Jacob was somehow trying to barter with God, but what he was doing was expressing his trust in what God already had promised him (Gen. 28:14-15). The foundation of Jacob’s vow was on what God had already guaranteed. Jacob was binding himself to the Lord just as the Lord had graciously bound Himself by His covenant to Jacob.

God had unexpectedly and graciously revealed Himself to this deceiver. He assured Jacob of His faithfulness to keep His covenant with



Abraham through Jacob. Therefore, throwing himself on the mercy of God, Jacob was ready to worship the Lord at this place to which he would one day return (35:1-15).

**BIBLE SKILL:** *Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible passage.*

Recall an occasion when you experienced a vivid, unforgettable encounter with God. Perhaps it occurred when you accepted Christ as Savior. Or you may think of another experience at a later point in your spiritual pilgrimage. In any case, that encounter served as a marker for you. It became an event or location that you could return to in your mind, if not physically, to undergird certainty or to renew commitment. Bethel served as that kind of experience for Jacob. Read the account of Jacob's return to Bethel in Genesis 35:1-15 to renew his commitment. How would you describe your "Bethel"?

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## VERSE 22

As evidence of his commitment to worship the Lord, Jacob committed himself to giving to the Lord *a tenth* of all that God had given him, just as Abraham did with Melchizedek (14:20). In Hebrew, Jacob's promise was emphatically made, demonstrating an eagerness to demonstrate his love and devotion to God in this way. His giving the Lord *a tenth* was his way of expressing his trust in God to bless him as the Lord had promised.

 **How should believers respond to God's faithfulness to His promises?**

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers can see God working in the ordinary.
- + Believers can find peace in knowing that God is faithful to His promises.
- + Believers can experience the joy of God's presence.
- + Believers can live in the assurance of God's faithfulness.

**○ Discuss with your group ways you have seen God working in the ordinary. What are some ways we can become more sensitive to seeing Him at work in the ordinary affairs of life?**

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**○ How does the assurance of God's presence give you joy? What does living in the assurance of God's faithfulness look like?**

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**○ Memorize Genesis 28:14.**

## *Prayer Needs*

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