

## Genesis 28

### *God's Answer For An Anxious Heart*

It's been said that Satan's one tool that he'd never give up, never sell for any price, his most effective weapon, is discouragement.

Psychologists tell us that millions of people in our country suffer from depression, even though we live in one of the most prosperous nations on earth.

Even those who believe in Jesus Christ are susceptible to being disheartened and demoralized. And the more discouraged we become the harder it is to move out to serve God.

Now, today we have hundreds of different philosophical approaches to treating discouragement. But when it comes to a committed God follower, how do we deal with depression and discouragement?

One of the things we can do is to change some of the things in our lives. We can get busy doing the things we've neglected and that often breaks that cycle of discouragement and depression.

But what about those situations that we can't change. What about past failures, worries about the future, or present oppressive situations over which we have absolutely no control?

What's going to see us through? What's going to change our outlook?

Does God have something to say to us that will bring real tangible hope in time of need? What's God's answer for an anxious heart.

**Genesis 28 gives us an answer to that question. Turn there with me It's page 26.**

I really believe that Genesis 28 is one of the most comforting and encouraging passages of scripture in all of the Bible

Here's the background.

God had chosen a man named Abraham out of a pagan culture and promised to bless him and his descendants. Abraham's offspring would be the Jewish people.

God would use the Jewish people to write and preserve the Bible and also to be the heritage of Jesus Christ. Jesus was a Jew in every way.

Abraham had 2 sons, Ishmael and Isaac. The promises were to be fulfilled through Isaac. Isaac had 2 sons, Jacob and Esau. In their case the promises were to be fulfilled through Jacob.

These were people who were specially blessed by God, but they were still human beings like you and me and sometimes they failed to trust God.

Jacob had followed his mother's advice and tricked his father into blessing him. Actually, God had already promised him the blessing but Jacob and Rebekah lacked faith and so they tried to get things done their own way.

Jacob's brother Esau was so angry he wanted to kill Jacob. And so Rebekah his mother persuaded Isaac to send Jacob away to find a wife.

Our chapter opens with Isaac's charge of Jacob.

*I. We Have A Knack For Getting Into Situations That Can Become Discouraging*

**Read verses 1 – 5**

Isaac had wanted to bless Esau, his favorite son, even though God said it was Jacob who was to be blessed. Now that he had seen God prevent him from doing that Isaac was ready to do what was right.

Remember, it's always right to obey God, even when His way doesn't fit in with our plans. Finally Isaac wasn't in any mood to try to delay or thwart God's purposes.

The people who lived in the land where they were at the time were unbelievably degenerate so Isaac called Jacob and gave him strict instructions not to marry a Canaanite woman, almost in the same words that his father Abraham had used long ago concerning his own marriage.

Rather, Jacob was to go back to his mother's family in Padam-aram, and there take a wife from among his own cousins, the daughter's of his mother's brother. And so that neither Rebekah nor Jacob would have any more doubt about his

commitment to blessing Jacob, Isaac repeats the blessing in terms similar to the ones that God had used with him.

This is the blessing that God had first made to Isaac's father Abraham and it involved the land of Palestine, many descendants and the blessing itself.

Then Isaac sent him away and Jacob started out on his long journey. As far as Isaac and Rebekah know, the only place that Jacob was going to find a wife who was a believer in Jehovah was among their relatives so that's where they sent him.

Now, Esau reacts to all this in a very unique way. Look what he does.

### **Read verses 6 – 9**

Jacob's brother Esau took note of one fact. Isaac had sent Jacob away, not because he was afraid of Esau, because with God's blessing Esau couldn't have harmed him.

He had sent him away because of his concern over the women of Canaan. The wheels began to turn in Esau's brain.

"So that's why my father refused to give me the blessing. He's bent out of shape because I married a heathen wife."

So he went to Ishmael, his father's brother who had since died, and married one of his daughters. I can just hear him saying to himself "There, that should fix it." Now I've married one of our own race.

The problem was, as the national covenant promises, Ishmael and his descendants had already been rejected by God.

Esau figured that by keeping up outward appearances he could get what really only comes by faith. He added a little religious gloss to his otherwise rebellious, unbelieving life and figured that should make him OK. All he really proved was that he really didn't have a clue when it came to spiritual things.

What made good sense to Esau was the height of foolishness with God.

We keep seeing this theme over and over again in Genesis. When God plainly speaks

in the Bible we need to listen. We don't need to try and finagle things so that we can do what we want to do instead of what God wants.

But then the narrative moves to what's really the heart of this chapter. This, and the next 7 chapters are going to focus on Jacob and how God worked in his life.

When Abraham's servant went out to find a bride for Isaac it took him a relatively short time to return with Rebekah.

When Jacob goes out it ends up taking 20 years until he returns.

Up until this point he had spent 40 years in a rather restrictive family situation, dominated in many respects by his mother, but also affected seriously by his brother's worldliness and his father's weakness.

It was essential that he get out on his own if his character and his faith were ever to be built up so that he could really be used by God. During these 20 years he became strengthened by being forced into dependence on God alone.

This is so often what God is trying to do in our lives. He puts us in situations where we can't control everything so that we learn to really lean on Him.

### **Read verses 10 & 11**

As Jacob started out all he had to go on were the promises contained in God's blessing.

He didn't have a caravan, he didn't have any armed servants to protect him, he wasn't experienced in living off the land like his brother Esau. I'm sure he had some money and clothes but otherwise he was alone in a strange and dangerous country.

Here he was separated from his mother that he dearly loved, hated by his brother, filled with memories of his own past deceptions and now facing a long, hard journey.

If anyone was ripe for discouragement, it was Jacob. He had all the promises of Abraham, but physically he had nothing.

Just a stone for a pillow and the sky for a tent. (I think I've stayed at a few hotels who got their pillows from the same place he got his!)

But God had plans for Jacob. Some people think this is the place of his coming to real faith in God but I don't. Jacob was a believer in the God of his father long before he gets here, that's clear.

But listen, this is where God prepares him for the rest of his life. This is where God deals with Jacob's discouragement and when Jacob leaves this place he leaves as a changed man.

The place that Jacob beds down is about 70 miles north of Beersheba. He's been on the road about 2 or 3 days now.

This place, Bethel, the house of God, was where Jacob's grandfather Abraham had built an altar. It was the place that Jacob would later return to in Genesis 35. Bethel would turn out to be a life long memorial of God's promise to him and of God's abilities to fulfill those promises.

As Jacob arrived at Bethel, the Bible doesn't say whether he realized this place had been important to Abraham. The remains of Abraham's altar might still have been standing there. Maybe Jacob used one of the very stones for a pillow as he slept that night.

At any rate, it was at this time, and at this place that God chose to make himself personally known to Jacob, as He had been known to Abraham and as He had been known to Isaac.

Jacob had known and believed many of God's promises practically all of his life. I have no doubt that he'd worshipped the Lord and prayed to him although his faith was a bit shaky.

But never before had God actually appeared and spoken to Jacob as he had to Abraham and Isaac. Now He does, in the form of a dream.

- I. We Have A Knack For Getting Into Situations That Can Become Discouraging*
- II. God Has Answers For Those Times Of Despair*

### **Read verse 12**

Two thousand years ago God completed the revelation of Himself His Word. The Bible is complete and sufficient for life. The last book of the Bible gives this warning: *For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to*

*these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. Revelation 22:18-19*

God's not giving direct revelation today in the forms of dreams or visions in the same way He did, but before the Bible was completed God did get His message across to certain individuals in this way.

I don't mean to say that God can't use dreams or visions. There's been some amazing reports coming out of the Islamic world of Muslims who had dreams in which they saw Jesus, and He told them to seek Him.

The difference there is that God's not giving out new truth. He's not adding to what's in the Bible. He's just reaching into people's lives in places where the Bible isn't readily available.

The New Testament book of Hebrews tells us that in the past God spoke at various times and in various ways. Today the Bible is the way God speaks to His people.

In the time of Jacob there was no Bible and so God spoke directly to Jacob.

In his dream Jacob saw a ladder and that ladder has generated all kinds of interpretations. Some people have seen it as the church, others as the pathway of the faithful. There's a song, *We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder*.

It was Martin Luther who first pointed out that Jesus Christ Himself claimed to be Jacob's letter in John chapter 1.

There Jesus was speaking to Nathaniel, who had just been brought by Philip to Jesus, *And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."* John 1:51

The Bible tells us, *There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus* ( I Timothy 2:5). That means that there's one ladder between heaven and earth and that is Jesus.

But, of course, the question we have to ask is what did this dream mean to Jacob. He didn't know anything about the church, or the incarnation of Christ. What was

God telling Jacob that he understood in his own circumstances?

I believe the next few verses give us the answer to our question, the ladder turns out to be a visible sign of what God is going to verbally say and explain.

Notice first of all God identifies Himself.

**Read verse 13 a – through “Isaac”**

It's Yahweh, the personal God of Jacob and his ancestors that is at the top of the ladder.

Next God repeats the Abrahamic covenant.

**Read verse 13b – 14**

He promises the land of Palestine. He promises a multitude of descendants. And He promises that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Him which we recognize as a promise of the Messiah.

Finally God makes this promise... **Read verse 15**

Now at this point I'm sure that Jacob had gone to bed wondering how the covenant promises were ever going to work out. He went to bed a lonely, discouraged man.

But, look how God deals with the problem of discouragement. He says, “Jacob, I am with you. You are not on your own like you think. You are not out fending for yourself. I am right there and I'm not going to leave until I have accomplished every single thing that I've promised to do in your life.”

What did that ladder really represent to Jacob? It was God saying “Jacob there's a connection between heaven and earth. There's something that keeps us united – you below on earth and Me here in heaven. And beyond that angels are ministering in your life.”

Hebrews 1:13 and 14 *But to which of the angels has He ever said: “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool”? Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?*

God was showing Jacob something that we can only see by faith. Through angels God protects. Through His ministering spirits God fulfills and strengthens just like the angels ministered to Jesus after His temptation in the wilderness.

We have a promise like this one that God made to Jacob. It's in Hebrews 13:5 where God says, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* And incidentally that is an Old Testament quote from Deuteronomy chapter 31 that's repeated in the New Testament.

We have the promise of Jesus Christ in Matthew 28, *Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

What God said to Jacob in a dream, He says to us over and over again in His inspired, infallible, and sufficient Word. I won't leave you until I've accomplished every purpose I've designed for you.

Bill MacRae at Believer's Chapel in Dallas tells the story about a church bulletin he saw once where the Pastor had a note about people leaving right after holy communion.

He was very disturbed about this and he said that after communion the presence of Christ lasts at least 15 minutes in your body and therefore everyone should remain in worship at least 15 minutes before leaving.

Well, God doesn't come into your life through taking communion, but what's even more important is, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ He never leaves. Not today, tomorrow or the next day!

Well, what affect did all this have on Jacob? It accomplished exactly what God intended it to.

We're given 3 responses of Jacob to God's promise.

The first is in **verse 16**

He was assured of the presence of the God. Now, it is significant that Jacob didn't just say that God is in this place, but he says "LORD" This is Yahveh.

He meant a lot more than just that God was omnipresent. God is everywhere and I don't doubt that Jacob knew that.



But what he didn't know was that he was in the presence of God in a personal way. That is why he uses the name Yahveh. That's the personal, covenant name of the God of his fathers.

Let me ask you something. Are you discouraged about your past?

Do you feel like you've blown it so badly that God's just given up on you? Are you depressed thinking, "How can God ever be real and vital in my life?"

The Bible says, God is with you! He hasn't rejected you. You may have stepped outside of His blessing for a while but God still is working to conform you into the image of His Son.

*I. We Have A Knack For Getting Into Situations That Can Become Discouraging*

*II. God Has Answers For Those Times Of Despair*

*III. Our Response Should Be To Rejoice In The Fact Of God's Presence With Us*

The second response of Jacob is in verse 17... **Read 17 – 19**

The promise of God transformed the place where he was.

When he went to sleep it was a bleak, barren, lonely, wasteland. When he woke up it was Bethel, the very house of God. It was an awesome place.

Nothing had changed out there except Jacob's outlook.

The rocks were still rocks, the brush was still brush, the hills were still hills. But Jacob had changed. So he anoints the stone and consecrates the place.

Are you discouraged because of where you are and what's going on in your life? Are you down because of your home, marriage, office, family, school, parents? Do things seem bleak and lonely and hopeless and unfair?

We cry out, "God change our surroundings. God make the people in my life different. Solve my problems."

You know what? If God always did that we'd never know what it meant to trust in Him. We'd have no idea of how to walk by faith and not by sight.

When I was a kid I read about people finding a magic lamp and the genie granting them 3 wishes. I used to think I know what my first wish would be. I'd wish that every wish I wished from now on would come true.

Hey, why labor over only 3 when you can have them all. Now I look back on my life and say, "Thank you God for not always giving me what I thought I wanted." I'd have made a total mess of my life.

You know how to have your circumstances transformed? Have your mind renewed. A consciousness of God's presence will transform where you are in life into something totally different.

Have you trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?

Then whatever situation you are in God is abiding in your life. Angels are ministering to you. God is accomplishing his purposes in you. How awesome is that?

The 3rd response of Jacob is found in the rest of the chapter.

### **Read verses 20 -22**

Occasionally when I study through a passage I come to a conclusion that is different from one I came to in the past.

I have to admit that I have seen Jacob in a bit of a different light than I did before. He is a trickster in some ways but all in all he is much more of a man of faith than a lot of commentators give him credit for.

The way these verses are worded it sounds like Jacob is striking up a bargain with God which is the way I took this previously

It looks like he is saying, "If God does all these good things for me. – then and only then will Yahveh be my God."

The question is, in this Hebrew construction, where should the apodosis start? In other words where does the "then" go?

There is no Hebrew word for "then." It's really the word "and" being used as "then."

Leopold, the German Hebrew scholar points out it fits much better at the beginning of verse 22 then before the words “the Lord” in verse 21.

What he’s really saying is “if (in the sense of “since”) God will be with me, and keep me, and feed me, and cloth me, and bring me back to my father’s house and be my personal God, then, this pillar will be the house of God. This will mark the place as a place of worship, and I’ll give God a tenth of all.

Giving God a tenth of all is really an acknowledgement that it all comes from God’s hand and ultimately all belongs to Him in the first place.

This is Jacob’s commitment to live for the Lord. Jacob was probably, for the first time in his life, really giving of himself to the Lord.

The next chapter starts, *So Jacob went on his journey...*

He got up from here and went out with a different attitude and a different perspective. He left to face all the frustrations and problems of the future with a new viewpoint.

Are you discouraged today because of the future?

Are you anxious over important decisions you have to make, the future of your children, what you are going to do with your life?

Listen, God is with you. Past, present, or future God is with you.

He is going to keep you in the way that you are going and He is going to bring to pass everything that He said He would in your Christian walk. And that ultimately means being made Christ in every way.

What is God’s cure for discouragement and depression? His cure is the awareness of His abiding presence based upon His unchanging promises and found in His Word. That will transform your present circumstances. Give you a new outlook on the future and give you victory in spite of the past.

Are we still going to get discouraged at times? Sure. Are some people going to slip into depression and need others to come along side them to help them? It’s going to happen.

We live in a fallen world and emotional troubles are always a potential just like we get physically sick in our world. But in both cases we need to remember that the Bible identifies God as Yahveh Rapha. That's Hebrew for the God who heals.

God wants to heal you today. If you haven't already, start by receiving the forgiveness that was bought and paid for by the Son of God, Jesus.

*Jesus said, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6*

That's where it all starts. We recognize our sin before God and we receive His provision Jesus who said so plainly, He's the only way.

Then we begin to see life differently. Then we begin to let God's promises control and undergird us.

What's God's answer for an anxious heart? Really the answer is God Himself. How real is He to you today? How clear are you about His promises?

*He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. I Thessalonians 5:24*