





Bethel's Dream – Genesis 28

GENESIS 28:1-5

This chapter opens with Isaac blessing his son. Among Isaac's instructions to Jacob, one particular one stands out: "Do not marry a Canaanite woman." This simple command carries profound significance, as it reflects a broader theme found throughout Scripture—the call to be set apart.

Just as Jacob was chosen for a holy purpose, we, as believers, are chosen and set apart by God.

There's a clear boundary drawn between the ways of the world and the ways of God. The Canaanites represented a culture and a people whose practices were often at odds with God's commands and principles. By urging Jacob to avoid taking a wife from among them, Isaac was emphasizing the importance of maintaining spiritual purity and faithfulness to God's standards.

Similarly, as Christians, we are called to embrace this principle of separation. We are called to live lives that reflect the light of God's truth—righteousness in the midst of a dark and fallen world. This doesn't mean isolating ourselves from society. What it does mean is that we walk in

obedience to God's Word and stand apart from the secular values of the world around us because of the grace He has shown us.

Just as Jacob was set apart for a specific purpose within his family, we too are set apart for a divine purpose within God's redemptive plan. We're called to be a holy people, distinct and separate from the patterns of this world, consecrated for the service of our heavenly Father. By seeking purity and holiness through repentance and obedience to God's Word, believers can become instruments useful to God, ready to fulfill His purposes and engage in the good works that bring glory to Him.

In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. –2 Timothy 2:20-21, NIV

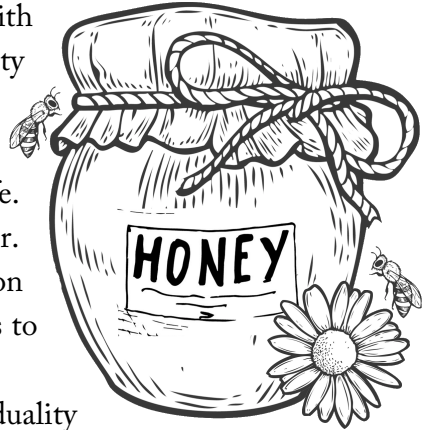
Isaac blessed Jacob saying, "So that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham." This blessing given to Jacob extends to all who believe through faith in Jesus Christ. As Galatians 3:9 says, "Those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith." This affirms the gospel's fulfillment in Abraham's promise: "All nations will be blessed through you."

So, what land is Isaac talking about there? The land that God gave to Abraham was known as "Canaan's" land (named after Noah's grandson).

When the Israelites eventually possessed the land, it became known as the Promised Land or the Land of Israel. It held significant spiritual and historical importance for the Israelites as the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and the land of their inheritance.

The Land of Canaan is described in the Bible as "a land flowing with milk and honey." This imagery represents the spiritual abundance that

believers inherit through their union with Christ. Just as Canaan was a land of prosperity and abundance for the Israelites, life in Christ is characterized by spiritual blessings, divine provision, and abundant life. But that's not all that Canaan was known for. Moses and Joshua knew that taking possession of the land meant that there would be giants to face and battles to overcome.



Similarly, in the Christian life, this duality persists. The blessings of spiritual abundance are accompanied by the inevitable battles against sin that challenge and refine our faith. Just as the Israelites could not claim the land without facing the giants, so too must Christians expect to encounter spiritual resistance. In 1Peter 2:11 we read, "Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul."

The phrase "wage war" illustrates the serious and ongoing nature of the struggle against desires that can harm the soul. It's a call to vigilance and perseverance in the face of internal challenges, aligning with the metaphorical giants that must be faced and overcome in the spiritual life.

❓ What does it mean to be 'set apart'? Can you find a scripture that reflects this?

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What are some 'giants' you've recently faced or are still facing, and how can you overcome them?

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In your own words, what does 1 Peter 2:11 mean? And can you give an example of one?

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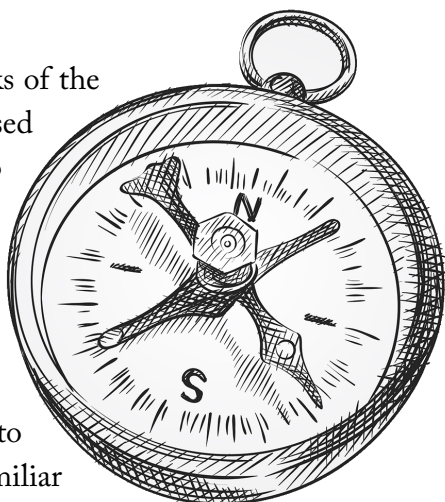
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GENESIS 28:6-9

The Bible says, "All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.'" (Galatians 3:10, NIV)

We see a similar picture of this in Esau's misguided attempt to please his parents. He knows they don't want him to marry a Canaanite woman and so he goes to Ishmael's family to find a wife. If you're familiar



with the family history, you know that Ishmael is a half-brother to Isaac, also one of Abraham's sons, but there's a difference between these two men: Isaac represents the new covenant which is by faith in Christ, while Ishmael represents the old covenant, which is by the works of the law.

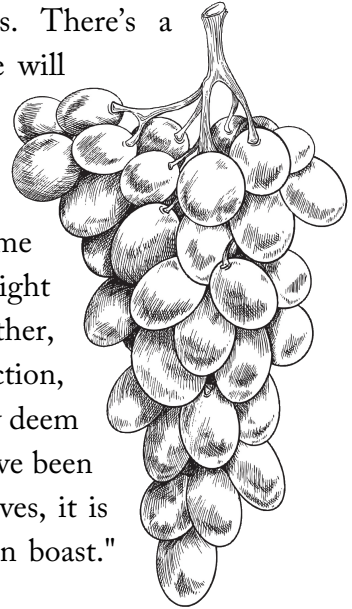
For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman [Ishmael] and the other by the free woman [Isaac]. His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise. These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. —Galatians 4:22–24, NIV

When we come across a statement like this, where Paul says, "these things are being taken figuratively," it invites us to look beyond the immediate context of the verse to the spiritual lessons that can be drawn from it.

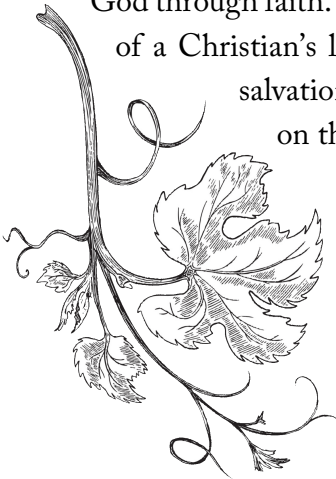
So, what lesson can we draw from this passage? It's not like people in our cities are bringing their sheep into the temple on a Saturday afternoon to make atonement for their sins. What we are seeing today, however, are people expecting to earn their salvation or favor with God through religious

traditions, or because of high moral standards. There's a misconception out there that these actions alone will secure a right standing with God. What they're sadly missing here is the fact that salvation comes by grace.

The Bible tells us that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. As much as someone might think they're a good person, in one way or another, they're falling short of God's standard of perfection, which makes them just as guilty of sin as those they deem sinful. The Bible tells us, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9, NIV)



And so, we see that salvation isn't something we earn, it's a gift from God through faith. While actions and moral living are important aspects of a Christian's life, they're a response to, rather than the cause of, salvation. The root of our faith is in Christ. It's by His work on the cross that we're saved.



We can rest in that promise knowing that we're saved by faith through grace. Not by our own works, but by the grace of God. And so, we enter into a "rest" as we join in salvation with Christ, but there also remains a final rest for us as believers when we leave this world and the struggles behind.

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.

—Hebrews 4:8–9, NIV

While Esau went the way of the flesh, Jacob went the way of the Spirit. This concept of salvation through Christ alone is something that Jacob is about to experience in an awe-inspiring way.

❓ Galatians 4:22-26 uses the story of Ishmael and Isaac to convey deeper spiritual truths. What do each of their mothers represent??

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❓ Can someone earn their salvation by just being good? Why or why not?

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? What is the difference between believing that God exists and having faith in God? (see James 2:14-25)

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GENESIS 28:10-22

As I was reading this chapter, I found it curious that instead of using a rolled up blanket or tunic, to rest his head, Jacob chose a stone, but then I did some digging and discovered that sleeping on a stone was not that unusual in ancient times. According to egypttoday.com, stone pillows were designed to elevate the head. “It usually consists of a flat base and then a concave section on its upper side to rest the head. Headrests made of marble, ivory, ceramics, stone, wood, and even glass were found in Egyptian tombs from 3000 BC to 30 BC. Headrests help prevent insects from crawling into the mouth, nose, ears or across the face.”

(egypttoday.com, Why did ancient Egyptians sleep on pillows made of stone?)

So, while it might not be all that out of the ordinary to see a rock used as a pillow, I can’t help but think that God put this little detail into the chapter for a reason. As we look at the larger picture here, we see an illustration of Christ by whom Jacob finds rest. 1 Corinthians 10 refers to Christ as a rock that both followed the Israelites and sustained them: “They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they



drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.” (1 Corinthians 10:3-4)

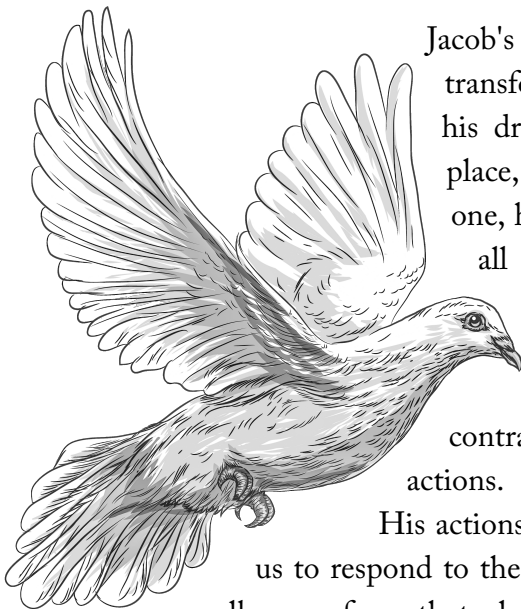
The chapter continues, telling us that as Jacob was sleeping, “He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.” (Genesis 28:12, NIV). The ladder or the staircase we read about in this dream is a picture of Christ. We know this because Jesus Himself alludes to being the ladder in John 1:51, illustrating His role as the mediator between God and man—the link between heaven and earth.

When Jesus declared, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, NIV), He was establishing Himself as the ultimate fulfillment of that link between God and humanity. Jacob's vision of the ladder with angels traversing it was a picture of Jesus Himself, linking heaven and earth, embodying the path of salvation for all.

In that profound moment of anointing the stone, Jacob marked the place as "Bethel," or "House of God," the gateway to heaven (Genesis 28:17-19). His words attest to his acknowledgement of God's presence, but his actions point to something much greater—the stone being Christ and the oil the imparting of the Holy Spirit upon Him. The term "Christ" comes from the Greek word "Christos," which means "anointed one" or "chosen one." Throughout the Old Testament, anointing with oil was a significant ritual used to consecrate or set apart individuals or things, like the temple and the contents in it. (see Exodus 40:9-16) In many cases it

symbolizes the imparting of the Holy Spirit, in others it may symbolizes faith, blessing, empowerment for a specific task, or divine favor. Jacob's actions attest to his faith in the coming Messiah, the anointed one of God, the gateway to Heaven.

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."
—Mark 1:9–11, NIV



Jacob's encounter at Bethel marked a pivotal transformation in his life. Awakened from his dream, not only did he consecrate the place, recognizing Christ as the anointed one, he also vowed to tithe, pledging part of all he would receive to God (Genesis 28:20-22). This act of commitment signified a change of heart—a readiness to serve and honor God, contrasting with his earlier self-serving actions.

His actions that morning are a reminder to all of us to respond to the grace that we're given. He didn't just walk away from that place, he walked away changed. We see evidence of his active faith through his good works:

1. **He Vowed to Tithe:** Jacob commits to giving a tenth of everything God provides him. This act of tithing shows Jacob's faith in God's provision and his willingness to honor God with his resources.

2. **He Worshipped God:** After his encounter with God, Jacob set up a memorial stone, poured oil on it, and declared the place to be "Bethel," which means "House of God." This demonstrates Jacob's desire to worship and honor God for the revelation he received.
3. **He Shared His Faith:** Jacob shared his experience with others, declaring, "Surely the Lord is in this place!" He acknowledged God's presence and the significance of his encounter, encouraged others to recognize and worship God.

We all have moments of realization that can drive us to change. The real question is: will we take the grace we've been given and use it to make a difference? Will we show through our actions that we understand and appreciate the mercy we've received? And will we commit to sharing the good that we've been given with others?

❓ In the last section, we talked about the difference between believing in God and having faith. How do Jacob's actions, following the dream, illustrate a living active faith?

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❓ What part of Jacob’s dream represented Christ, was it the angels, the ladder, or the voice above it? (see John 1:51) And how does this typify Him?

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❓ Have you ever had a moment of realization that drove you to change? What prompted it, and what change did you make?

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“THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS NOT MERELY KNOWING
OR HEARING, BUT DOING THE WORK OF CHRIST,
AND SUCH WORK WILL BE DONE BY OUR HANDS,
OUR FEET, OUR EYES, AND OUR HEARTS,
ALL TRANSFORMED BY HIS SPIRIT LIVING WITHIN US.”

— UNKNOWN



Answer Key

Chapter 4 – Genesis 28

GENESIS 28:1-5

What does it mean to be 'set apart'? Can you find a scripture that reflects this?

It means to be dedicated to God, distinct in purpose and lifestyle from the world's ways.

What are some 'giants' you've recently faced or are still facing, and how can you overcome them?

(This answer will be different for everyone)

In your own words, what does 1 Peter 2:11 mean? And can you give an example of one?

1 Peter 2:11 urges believers to "abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul." This means that Christians are called to resist the impulses and temptations that are contrary to God's will, recognizing that these desires conflict with their spiritual well-being and calling.

An example of this might be choosing not to engage in gossip, despite the temptation to join in conversations that can harm others and contradict the call to love and speak well of our neighbors.

GENESIS 28:6-9

Galatians 4:22-26 uses the story of Ishmael and Isaac to convey deeper spiritual truths. What do each of their mothers represent?

and Sarah—represent two covenants:

Hagar represents the old covenant, associated with Mount Sinai, which is tied to the law and corresponds to Jerusalem of Paul's time, symbolizing bondage.

Sarah represents the new covenant of grace, associated with the heavenly Jerusalem, and signifies freedom.

The two women illustrate the contrast between living under the law, which leads to bondage, and living under the promise and grace of God, which brings freedom.

Can someone earn their salvation by just being good? Why or why not?

No, someone cannot earn their salvation by just being good. Salvation is a gift from God, not a result of our efforts. As Ephesians 2:8-9 explains, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." This scripture points out that our relationship with God depends on His mercy rather than our merit.

What is the difference between believing that God exists and having faith in God? (see James 2:14-25)

Believing that God exists is an acknowledgment of His reality, similar to acknowledging any fact. Having faith in God involves a deeper personal trust and reliance on Him, which is demonstrated through actions.

This type of faith is not just intellectual, it impacts how we live. James emphasizes that faith without works is dead, illustrating that true faith in God naturally leads to transformative behaviors and good deeds.

GENESIS 28:10-22

In the last section, we talked about the difference between believing in God and having faith. How do Jacob's actions, following the dream, illustrate a living active faith?

Jacob's actions illustrate a living, active faith in several ways. Upon waking, Jacob immediately sets up a stone pillar and anoints it, recognizing the place as the house of God and a gate to heaven (Genesis 28:18-19). This action points to his acknowledgment and acceptance of the coming Messiah.

He then makes a vow to faithfully serve God and to tithe.

These actions demonstrate how a true faith is expressed through concrete actions and commitments based on God's promises.

What part of Jacob's dream represented Christ, was it the angels, the ladder, or the voice above it? (see John 1:51) And how does this typify Him?

In Jacob's dream, the ladder represented Christ.

This ladder typifies Christ as the bridge or connection between heaven and earth, facilitating direct access to God for humanity. Christ connects us to the Father, enabling us to have a relationship with God through His life, death, and resurrection.

Have you ever had a moment of realization that drove you to change? What prompted it, and what change did you make?

(This answer will be different for everyone)