



Lesson One

FANCY MEETING YOU HERE! (Genesis 28:10-12)



We meet Jacob on the lam after he'd stolen his brother Esau's birthright and blessing by deceiving their father, Isaac. Afterward, Rebekah, their mother, warned Jacob of Esau's plot against him: "Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you. Now then, my son, do what I say: Flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran" (Genesis 27:42-43, NIV).

Jacob was definitely running from his past, his problems, and, most importantly, the consequences of his conniving personality. Around sunset, the patriarch found himself in between—neither here (Beersheba), nor there (Haran). The in-between of God's promises and their fulfillment is when most of us fall into doubt. Perhaps Jacob thought: Can God really use me? Maybe my brother was the better choice. Why did I think deception would get me ahead in life?

The seventy-seven-year-old patriarch had traveled nearly sixty miles at this point. He was tired, tortured, and being tested. Having left in haste, he was forced to use a stone as his pillow. It's a wonder he slept at all. But as the darkness grew thicker, Jacob developed night vision. God would manifest Himself at a thin place—where heaven and earth touch.

It was a ladder (a stairway to heaven) that brought the two together. And, on it, angels traversed up and down from land to sky. Note that the angels went from the bottom to the top and back again. It seems that they carried Jacob's prayers and concerns up as they brought God's comfort and promises back down. That's what happens at thin places: we encounter God in a fresh way that deeply impacts our lives. Jacob would never be the same.

Day One: A Pillow for His Head

READ THE VERSE BELOW AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

“Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it” (Genesis 28:10-12).

PRACTICAL OBSERVATION:

1. Jacob journeyed from Beersheba to Haran. Read Genesis 27:41-42, then answer the following questions.
 - a. Describe Esau’s feelings toward Jacob and why he felt as he did.
 - b. Explain what Rebekah heard and how she handled the information.
 - c. How did Jacob respond to Esau’s threats?
2. What phrase makes you think Jacob was between two places and why did he stop there?
3. Describe Jacob’s sleeping arrangements. Could you sleep under these circumstances?
4. Explain what happened while Jacob slept.
5. Where did the ladder begin and end? Describe who used it.

HARAN is the place that Terah settled with his son, Abraham (then known as Abram), and his grandson, Lot, on their journey from Ur of the Chaldees to Canaan. It is thought to have been in what is now Turkey. Its inhabitants worshiped Sin, the moon god.

ANGEL means messenger, and describes spiritual, super-human beings. They appeared most frequently in connection with Jesus in the New Testament. There is a huge quantity of angels; as Jesus said on the Mount of Olives, He could call down twelve legions (about 72,000) of them to His defense.

PLAYING FAVORITES: Jacob was born into a dysfunctional family in which the parents played favorites with their twin boys. Esau, the hunter, was dad’s preferred child. Jacob, the more domestic boy, was mom’s beloved. Of course, this caused sibling rivalry. The result was hatred and contention.

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

6. Jacob’s family was filled with strife and competition. Journal about your nuclear family and what your home was like growing up. How did it shape you?

7. Jacob ran from his problems and his past. Check the distraction that best describes how you run from problems.

___ Stay busy ___ Isolate from others ___ Seek approval from others

___ Gossip ___ Accumulate money ___ Use drugs or alcohol.

___ Irritability ___ Excessive TV ___ Emotionally unavailable

8. Use the following Scripture as inspiration to write a prayer letting go of your past and embracing a new life in Christ:

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness”
(Ephesians 4:22-24, NIV).

“Running away from your problems is a race you’ll never win.
You cannot heal what you will not face.” –Unknown

Day Two: A Promise For His Heart

“If you’re not dead then God’s not done,” is one of those lyrics that emboldens your heart to refuse to give up when life’s got you down. David could have written this song as he often feared for his life. He, too, had a family member (his son, Absalom) chasing him down to kill him. And just like Jacob, God gave him sleep and courage in the middle of the trial. Listen to David’s testimony from Psalm 3:

“O LORD, how many are my foes!

How many rise up against me!

Many are saying of me,

‘God will not deliver him.’

Selah

But you are a shield around me, O LORD;
you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.

To the LORD I cry aloud,
and he answers me from his holy hill.

Selah

I lie down and sleep;

I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.

I will not fear the tens of thousands
drawn up against me on every side” (vv. 1-6, NIV).

We all face fear and threatening foes. Perhaps the risk of financial ruin has sent you on an emotional tailspin. Maybe disease and the threat of death has gripped your heart with dread. It could even be the stabbing accusation of a friend that feels like a mortal wound. But God! God is not done writing your story or using your circumstances for His glory! God can turn the worst thing in your life into something amazing. After all, He promises to give you beauty for ashes. The oil of joy for mourning. And the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Let’s see what God did to redeem Jacob’s circumstances in today’s text.

READ THE VERSE BELOW AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

“And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: ‘I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you’” (Genesis 28:13-15).

PRACTICAL OBSERVATION:

1. Describe what God’s position was when He spoke to Jacob.
2. List those whom God claimed to be Lord over in this text.
3. Explain God’s promises regarding the land.
4. Describe God’s threefold promises regarding Jacob’s descendants.
 - 1) _____
 - 2) _____
 - 3) _____
5. Explain the promise of God’s presence to Jacob.

ABOVE IT ALL! *Circumstances have a way of getting our eyes off of God. God is always above all the affairs of humanity. He’s above you, too. He’s lifted up, no matter what is happening or who is harassing you. “I will lift up my eyes to the hills— from whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:1-2).*

PRESENCE: *The promise of God’s presence is one of the most precious assurances He gives His people. When God told Moses He would no longer lead the children of Israel through the desert, but would instead send an angel, the prophet refused to proceed without God’s presence. You and I have the promise of God presence, too. “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.” (Matthew 28:20).*

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

6. We’ve learned that God dwells above our problems. Using the word ABOVE as an acrostic, list some of the things God is above in your life:

A

B

O

V

E

7. God is known as the promise keeper. Paul says that Christians have inherited the Abrahamic covenant, too. “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29, NIV). Write a prayer thanking God for His faithfulness to you.

◦ **COVENANT:** *God reaffirmed His covenant to Jacob just as He had to Jacob’s father Isaac and grandfather Abraham. It was an unconditional covenant, meaning God would never break this promise, even if the people to whom He made it failed in some way. Through no goodness of their own, God determined to call out a special people for Himself, and through that special people He would bless the whole world.*

◦

“The will of God will not take you where the grace of God will not keep you.”
—Bernadette Devlin

Day Three: A Place He Met God

The best declaration made after discovering a thin place came from Jacob's lips, "The LORD is in this place; and I knew it not" (Genesis 28:16, KJV). It's what theologians call the manifest presence of God. God's omnipresence implies that, no matter where you are, He is always there—whether you're aware of it not. The psalmist wrote, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there" (Psalm 139:7-8).

During New Testament times, the Holy Spirit came to indwell believers at all times. That's why we can say that He will never leave you. Your heart is His home. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "Christ will make His home in your hearts as you trust in him" (Ephesians 3:17, NLT).

However, God's manifest presence is something very different than His other appearances. This is a time and place where He chooses to reveal Himself to an individual. It's not a common occurrence—it's rather rare and unexpected. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego never dreamed that God would walk with them in the fire.

Dear sister, do not let darkness, loneliness, hopelessness, or any other thing separate you from God. In fact, maybe it is exactly these kinds of circumstances that are ripe for God to reveal His manifest presence to you—when you never saw it coming.

READ THE VERSE BELOW AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

"Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.' And he was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!'" (Genesis 28:16-17).

PRACTICAL OBSERVATION:

1. Describe Jacob's state at the beginning of today's text.
2. In your own words, describe Jacob's declaration.
3. Explain how this situation made him feel. Why do you think this is the case?
4. How did Jacob describe this "in-between place" now?
5. List the two descriptions Jacob gave to this place.

DREAM: A dream is something that happens while a person is asleep. What Jacob experienced seems more like a vision than a dream. Both describe envisioning something with supernatural insight. Abram was in a God-induced dream state when the Lord walked through his sacrifices while making His covenant known to the patriarch (see Genesis 15).

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

- 6. Journal about a time you sensed God’s voice—when reading God’s Word or in the quiet recesses of your heart. How did it make you feel? What was your response?

- 7. Fill in the chart to discover how God’s presence brings the conviction of sin.

SCRIPTURE	PERSON CONVICTED OF SIN
Psalm 51:4	
Isaiah 6:5	
Acts 2:36-38	

AFRAID: When God manifests Himself to humans, the most natural response is fear. The word here means to fear, or to morally revere. His holiness exposes our sinfulness. After the great catch of fish, Peter realized that Jesus was God and said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (Luke 5:8).

CONVICTION: is the work of the Holy Spirit to expose sin in our lives (pride, jealousy, anger, lust, selfishness, etc.) in order to lead us to confess and repent of that sin. Afterward we experience God’s grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation. However, condemnation is the work of the Devil. It produces shame that makes us run from God in dread.

“When Holy God draws near in true revival, people come under terrible conviction of sin. The outstanding feature of spiritual awakening has been the profound consciousness of the Presence and holiness of God.” —Henry Blackaby

Day Four: A Pillar To Remember

It's hard to believe that a pile of rocks was the best way to honor God after He made His presence known. But it differentiated the children of Israel from those who worshipped pagan gods around them. Those who followed false gods carved idols out of wood or stone, crafting them into the likenesses of men, beasts, or nature. Some of the more elaborate icons were covered in gold or silver.

God despised this idol worship. The psalmist condemned this practice: "The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them" (Psalm 135:15-18, NIV). What foolishness to create a god in your own image!

In fact, God had called the Israelites to be a special people, set apart for the only true God who created heaven and earth and all that is in them. He alone is the God who is there, who cares, and who hears their prayers. God told Moses, "Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold. Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. If you make an altar of stones for me, do not build it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it" (Exodus 20:23-25, NIV).

These verses surely convict us today. Too often we trust in ourselves more than we trust God. We think that our works or wordy prayers gain us access to God. They don't. It is by grace that we were saved, and Jesus alone provides us free access to God through His precious blood. Keep your relationship simple and sincere—that's what will please your Heavenly Father.

READ THE VERSE BELOW AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

"Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously" (Genesis 28:18-19).

PRACTICAL OBSERVATION:

1. Describe how Jacob started his day and what that says about him.
2. What did he do with the stone that was his pillow?
3. Why do you think he poured oil on top of the pillar?
4. Describe the new name Jacob gave to this place and the reason you think he chose it.

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

5. Today we learned that Jacob was an early riser. Describe what you learn about the benefits of rising early from the following verses.

Psalm 130:6 _____

Isaiah 50:4 _____

Mark 1:35 _____

Luke 24:1 _____

6. Jacob used simple stones to honor God. Journal about some simple ways that you can worship God. Perhaps you, too, could choose a stone of remembrance for something special God did in your life.

ANOINTING OIL: *It is likely that the pouring of oil on the pillar was a way of dedicating it to God. Jacob built this pillar in haste, but one day he would return and make it into a proper altar. In Genesis 35:7, we see Jacob in Bethel again: “There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel, because it was there that God revealed Himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother” (NIV).*

BETHEL means “house of God.” Both Abraham and Jacob visited this place. It is a city about 10 miles east of Jerusalem. At one time the ark of the covenant resided in Bethel. “The Israelites, all the people, went up to Bethel.... And the Israelites inquired of the Lord. (In those days the ark of the covenant of God was there)”

MEMORIAL STONE: *Men and women in the Bible often used stones as a way to remember what God had done just as Jacob did. After the Israelites defeated the Philistines at Mizpah, Samuel laid a stone on the battlefield and named it Ebenezer which meant, “Thus far the Lord has helped us” (1 Samuel 7:12, NIV).*

“If we exalt money, status, or sex above the Word of God, we are living in idolatry. Every time we inwardly submit to the strongholds of fear, bitterness, and pride, we are bowing to the rulers of darkness. Each of these idols must be smashed, splintered, and obliterated from the landscape of our hearts.” —Francis Frangipane

Day Five: A Peace for the Future

The phrases if God and but God are the same, but different. Both express the hope and trust that God will come through to deliver us from danger and destine us for great blessing. But God conveys the idea that something bad has happened and that God will work all things together for our good (see Romans 8:28). He'll redeem the situation for our good and His glory.

However, if God promises that God will provide goodness and grace in the future—no matter what may come our way, He will provide and protect us always. Today, we see Jacob pray if God for the days and years to come. He asked God to pave the way before Him. He asked God to provide both food and clothing. And He asked God to give him peace until he made his way back home to his father's house.

Either phrase embraces the truth that God is in control of all that happens in our live—past, present, and future. That's why the psalmist could write of God's faithful presence: "You both precede and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head" (Psalm 139:5, TLB). Similarly, Thomas. O. Chisholm wrote this in his epic hymn, "Great is Thy Faithfulness." "Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide; strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow: blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!" Rest assured, dear one, God's got you—today and always.

READ THE VERSE BELOW AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

"Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You'" (Genesis 28:20-22).

PRACTICAL OBSERVATION:

1. Describe what Jacob did next.
2. What two provisions did Jacob ask for along the way?
3. What two provisions did Jacob ask for along the way?
4. Describe Jacob's long-term goal for the future.

VOW: A voluntarily-made solemn promise to God. It was a pledge binding the maker to fulfill a specific act. Jacob's vow in Bethel is the first vow mentioned in the Bible. Vows continued in the New Testament as Paul made a Nazarite vow similar to Samson's in the Old Testament.

5. What are the three things Jacob promised “if God” did as he asked?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

TITHE was the offering of one tenth of one’s income or property to God. It was an ancient practice among other nations beside the Hebrews. Moses offered a detailed account of tithing in Leviticus 27. The first tithe recorded in the Bible was after Abram defeated his enemies and offered his tithe to Melchizedek (see Genesis 14).

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

6. Fill in the chart to discover others who made a vow to God.

SCRIPTURE	THOSE WHO MADE VOWS TO GOD
1 Samuel 1:9-11	
Psalms 132:1-5	
Acts 18:18	

VOW ETIQUETTE: A vow is sacred and not to be entered into lightly. God takes our promise seriously. Solomon wrote, “When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed—better not to vow than to vow and not pay” (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5).

7. Journal about something you would ask of God in a vow, and what you would be willing to sacrifice to get it. Would you be willing to make a vow to God about this? Why or why not?

If a person gets his attitude toward money straight, it will help straighten out almost every other area in his life. —Billy Graham