

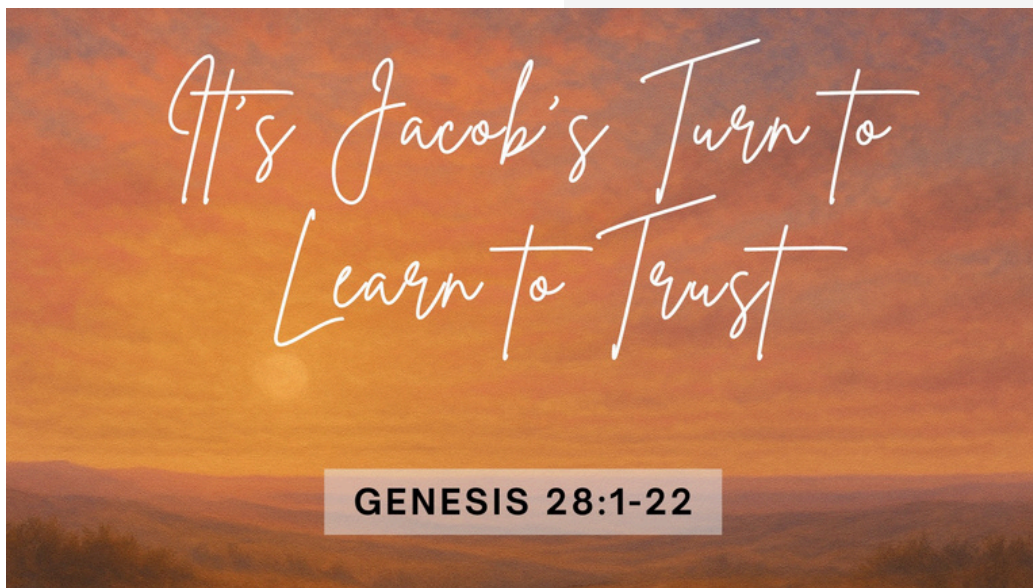
CCLEB SERMON

NOTES

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 2, 2025
GENESIS 28:1-22

PASTOR DUANE MILLER

IT'S JACOB'S TURN TO LEARN TO TRUST



In **Genesis** so far we have seen the LORD God show his covenant faithfulness through the generations despite the unfaithfulness of the people. The covenant of God gave Abraham, the covenant promise of “countless descendants a chosen people”, the covenant promise that God would “be with them”, that they would “possess the land” – all that was upheld by God on his end. And despite Abraham’s unfaithfulness, the covenant was passed to his son Isaac. And then in Isaac’s lifetime, likewise God upheld his end despite Isaac’s unfaithfulness. In today’s passage we see the blessing of the covenant being passed to the next generation Jacob. And what we see is that God is faithful and God’s covenant prevails despite the messiness of Jacob. And through that Jacob learns to trust. What does it take for you to trust?

Now context matters a lot in understanding what is happening in **Genesis 28**. In last week’s story, Rebekah, who is the wife of Isaac, plots with Jacob, the younger son, to steal Esau’s firstborn blessing. This was an elaborate plan that involved many layers of lying and deception and betrayal.

And Jacob and Rebekah successfully pull off the theft of Esau’s birthright. This theft and deception required much planning and precision sort of on the “Mission Impossible” level. And from the big picture perspective, the perspective of Eden, both Rebekah and Jacob take on the role of the shrewd and cunning serpent – the deceiver.

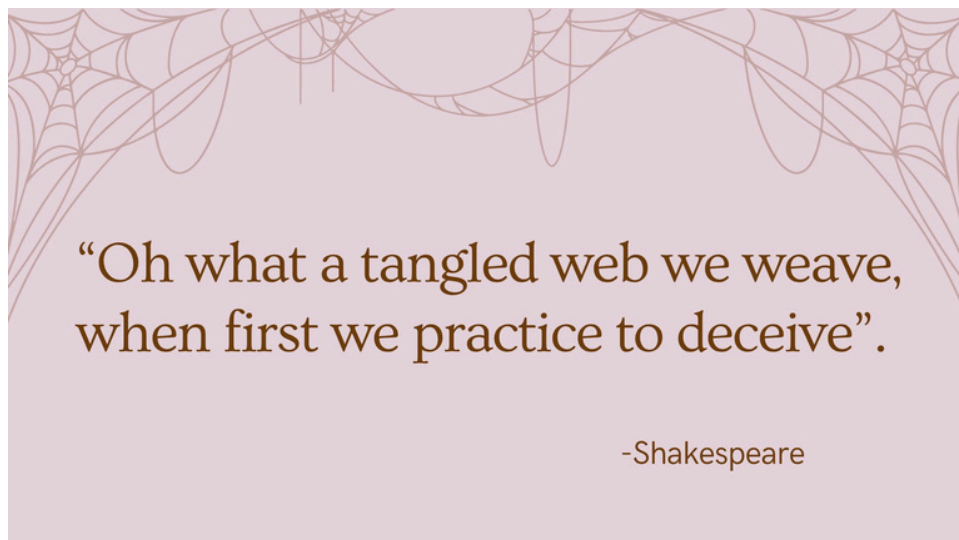
As you can imagine, Esau being on the receiving end of this lying and deception, didn’t like being tricked out of his inheritance blessing by Jacob and we see his strong emotions emerge. He grieves the loss in **verse 38** and then has murderous rage in **verse 41**.

Rebekah the mom, who seems to always be listening where she shouldn’t, hears Esau’s threat to kill Jacob so she urges Jacob to flee to her hometown till Esau’s “cool’s off” and “calms down”.

Now Rebekah is scared for Jacob, and we know that Jacob is her favorite. Rebekah has already proven to be conniving, deceptive and an eavesdropper who uses the information she gleans for her own agenda (sound like the serpent anyone?).

And in her shrewdness Rebekah knows that for Jacob to be protected from Esau she has to have the patriarch Isaac's involvement.

Part of Rebekah's shrewd deceptive plan is to use a known truth to protect Jacob, (**Genesis 27:46**) and that known truth is that she doesn't like the local Canaanite women and dreads the thought of one of them becoming Jacob's wife. And Rebekah uses that to convince her husband Isaac to protect their son Jacob from Esau killing him by sending Jacob away under the guise of "finding a wife for Jacob from her own family in Haran". All this drama and deception reminds me of a Shakespeare line from Marmion.



That's the backstory for **Chapter 28**. Now I said in the introduction that this chapter is all about the covenant. So what does all of this juicy drama have to do with the covenant God gave to Abraham and Isaac? God's plan is for the covenant to be passed from Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob to Jacob's twelve sons who become the twelve tribes of Israel. And this covenant being passed from Abraham to Isaac and now to Jacob has three threats to the covenant continuing.

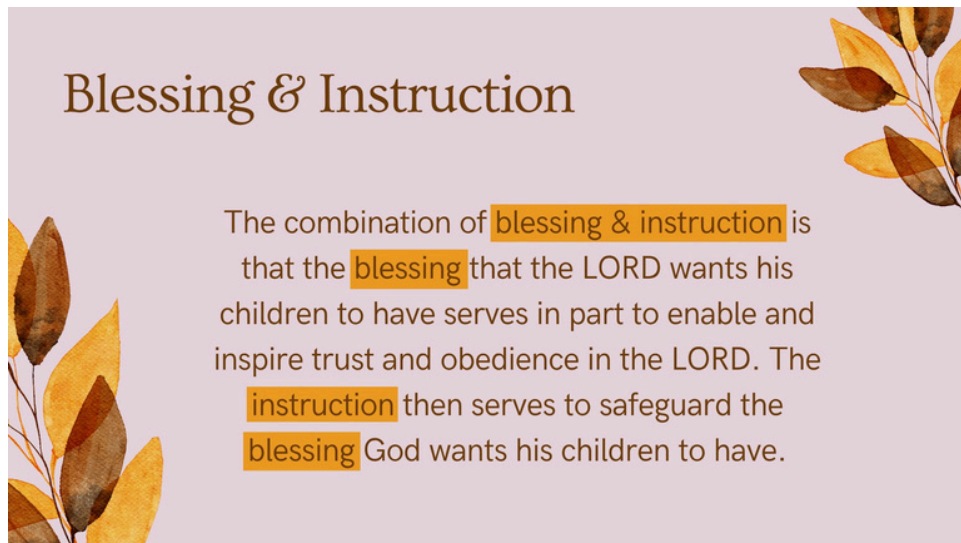
Three Threats to the Covenant		
1	2	3
Angry Esau wants to kill Jacob. If Esau kills Jacob the covenant passes to Esau.	Esau had already married local Hittite or Canaanite women. How could the chosen descendants of Abraham and Isaac be blessed and possess the land if Esau inherits the covenant, and he has already intermarried with people of the land?	Even if Jacob survived the threat from hate-filled Esau, Jacob who is not married at this point, cannot marry a local Canaanite for the same reason, otherwise Jacob's offspring and would not be separate from the people of the land, and could not possess the land.

So we see then starting in **Genesis 28:1** that God protects the covenant lineage from these threats through Rebekah's deception and scheming. Was this God's plan A for how the covenant would pass from Isaac to Jacob? Probably not, but God's will for the covenant prevails regardless of the shortcomings of Isaac, Rebekah and Jacob.

We see in **verse 1** Rebekah's scheme starts to work. Isaac buys into Rebekah's next deception, and Isaac unknowingly protects Jacob from Esau by sending Jacob away to find a wife.

So here is how Rebekah's scheme protects Jacob and Isaac protects the covenant at the same time. In **verse 1** we see that Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and gave him instruction not to marry a local Canaanite.

This combination of “blessing & instruction” or “blessing & commandment” – the pairing of blessing & instruction is an Old Testament covenant pattern. The LORD God used this same pairing of blessing & instruction in **Genesis 1:28** in the first covenant God made with Adam.



In other words the LORD says to Adam in **Genesis 1**, “I’ll bless your fruitfulness, you just have to follow my instruction and be willing to do your part”. Here is a principle. With God’s blessing or favor comes human responsibility. So take that blessing & instruction thinking to where we see Isaac use the blessing & instruction combination in the passing of the covenant on to his son Jacob. Isaac blesses Jacob and then gives Jacob instruction on how to safeguard the covenant. Isaac’s instruction to Jacob that safeguard’s covenant is that Jacob “must not marry any of these Canaanite women...



Now to give you a clear sense of how strong this instruction by Isaac is that protects the covenant, the language that is used in the original in **Genesis 28:1 NKJV** “you shall not take..” is grammatically similar to the language of the ten commandments. **Exodus 20:4a, 7a, 13a**. “You shall not____”. The Ten Commandments were the next covenant between God and the descendants of Jacob, the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Isaac instructs Jacob that he “must not marry any of these Canaanite women... instead go to..” is strong binding covenant language.

When I read Isaac say “You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan” in my head it is said with the same intensity that Gandalf, Tolkien’s The LORD Of The Rings character at the Bridge of Khazad Dum says to the evil Balrog, “You shall not pass”. That’s the level of intensity I hear in Isaac’s voice when instructing Jacob to not take a wife from the Canaanites.

So we see in **verse 2** that Isaac sends Jacob to Bethuel’s house in Haran, where Rebekah, his wife is from. “Bethuel” was Abraham’s brother’s son.

So Jacob is instructed by his father Isaac in (**verse 2**) to go to Haran and marry a first cousin. What is taboo in our society today, perfectly acceptable elsewhere and in history. In (**verse 3-4**) then Isaac after giving Jacob the instruction repeats the blessing of the covenant essentially passing the covenant on to Jacob.

Taboo

So Jacob heads off to Haran and as Jacob heads off on that trip we see in **verse 6-9** there is a little narrative inserted here about Jacob's brother Esau. The last we saw Esau was him grieving the loss of his firstborn birthright blessing that was stolen by Jacob, his grief turned to murderous hate – and Esau plotting Jacob's death. But in **verse 6-9** we see a change starting in Esau.

The verses tell us that Esau knew of Jacob being blessed by Isaac, and Jacob being told not to marry a Canaanite woman, and Jacob being sent to Haran to find a wife from his cousins. What Esau learned apparently meant something to Esau because we see that this prompted Esau to action. So Esau goes to his uncle Ishmael, his father Isaac's older brother, and Esau marries one of Ishmael's daughters. Another first cousin marriage. It's also interesting that both Ishmael and Esau are firstborn sons of their families that God passed up for giving the covenant blessing to, meaning the covenant passed to the younger son. And now the two "passed up firstborns" are joined through marriage. And it begs the question, was Esau trying to earn a blessing from his father by marrying a non-Canaanite? Or was this Esau softening or being repentant? We will just have to see.

Now back to Jacob's journey to Haran to marry a cousin, **verse 10**. Let's contrast this to Abraham sending his servant to Haran to find a wife for Isaac in **Genesis 24:10**. When Abraham sent his servant to Haran, Abraham sent the servant with ten loaded camels, a sampling of all his wealth, and a bride price, the dowry. Included were camel drivers and servants. So picture a whole camel caravan going to Haran.

However when Jacob goes to Haran to find a wife his journey is much different. Jacob himself tells us in **Genesis 32:10** that he left on the journey to Haran with only his staff. So contrast Abraham's servant and wealthy camel caravan headed to Haran in **Genesis 24**, to Jacob with only his staff headed to Haran in **Genesis 28**. The **Genesis 28** narrative presents Jacob more as a fugitive on the run, or a refugee seeking protection, like an exile.



And not far into Jacob's journey, maybe a day or two, Jacob stops for the night. And **verse 11** says "he found a stone to rest his head against". There is much misinterpretation surrounding both the stone and the dream he has here. So we will walk through this slowly. Old testament folklore is that Jacob used the stone as a pillow. Who uses a stone as a pillow, no one? The Hebrew here literally says Jacob "took the stone and placed it at his head" – not under his head. The ancient Jewish commentator Rashi suggests that this stone next to his head was meant as a protective barrier – perhaps tied to some stones being cultic symbols of divine presence.

And so while Jacob is sleeping, head near the stone, Jacob has a dream of a stairway that "reached.... **verse 12**. Now this is an interesting dream that has many implications, however first let me address what this stairway is and what it isn't.

The Hebrew root word means "to raise or build up" as in a "ramp or stairway". So this is not a ladder with rungs, it is more likely a stone stairway or ramp.



Some translations use the word "ladder" instead of "stairway" which is why this passage is often referred to as "Jacob's ladder". However, the Hebrew root word means "to raise or build up" as in a "ramp or stairway". So this is not a ladder with rungs, it is more likely a stone stairway or ramp. And to support this, the same word is used in contemporary literature to describe the terraced steps of ancient Babylonian ziggurats.



In the pagan theology of that region, these stairways were connections between the people and the gods – what some describe as a spiritual portal or gate.

So in Jacob's dreams in **verse 12** and in his dreams he sees a stairway between earth and heaven, with angels going up and down on it.

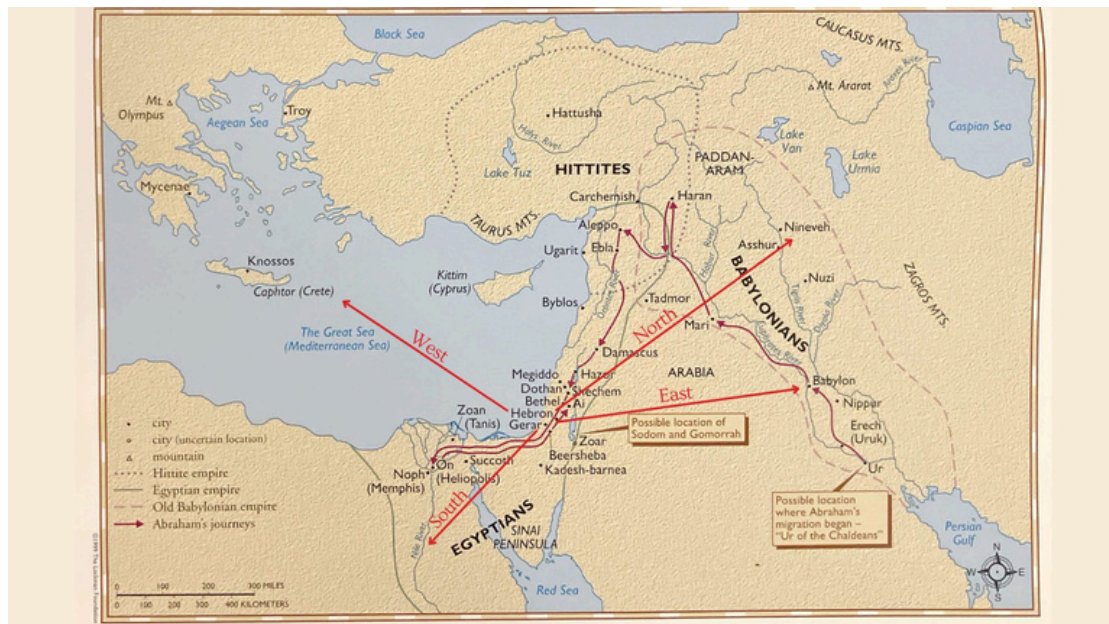
And **verse 13** tells us that the LORD was at the top. And from there the LORD speaks to Jacob.

God tells Jacob that he is the God of Abraham and Isaac. So all of the stories that Jacob knew about God's covenant faithfulness from Abraham and Isaac, that same God is now speaking to him. And the LORD tells him all the promises of the covenant that Abraham received from the LORD, that were passed to Isaac, are now passed to Jacob by the LORD. **Verse 14 -15.**

The descendants as the dust of the earth part is not new, however that the descendants would be spread out in four directions is new. And the LORD added in verse 15 that the LORD will be with them wherever they go, and keep them and bring them back to the land. This reads like prophecy and has been fulfilled in part.

There are several views on this prophecy. This prophecy was first fulfilled in Jacob moving to Haran for fourteen years, growing his family there, and then returning with his wife Rachel and with his wealth to the land God promised him in **Genesis 33**. Obviously the LORD was with Jacob, the LORD protected Jacob, and brought him home, just as he said he would.

A second view of the **verse 14-15** prophecy is that this spreading out in four directions is a prophecy regarding captivity and exile. We know from history that the descendants of Jacob, called the Israelites, do end up in captivity in Egypt. That is south. We also know that they do end up in captivity and exile in Assyria, that is North. They do end up in captivity and exile in Babylon, that is East. And they do much later end up in captivity in Europe, Germany, Spain, Poland etc. That is the West.



We also know from Old Testament history that God was with them, and did bring them back from Egypt, from Babylon, and Assyria, just like he said he would. And our modern history shows the Israelites returned and are returning from Europe.

[A lot of Old Testament prophecies are about the return of the descendants of Jacob to Israel. **Zechariah 10:9** and ff is one of those.]

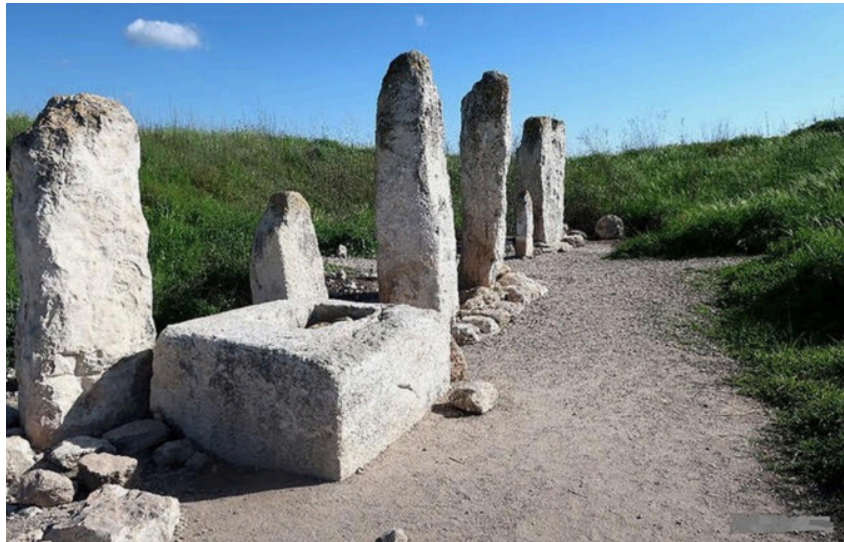
So now back to Jacob asleep, head near a rock in **Genesis 28**. In **verse 16-17** here is what happens next.

It is important to see this as Jacob's spiritual awakening. After the dream, Jacob now is aware that God is with him. Jacob now has his own relationship with the LORD because the LORD spoke to him. This was no longer just the God of Abraham and the God of his father Isaac. This was now his God too!

And it is clear that the presence of God overwhelmed him ..the text says he was "afraid". "Afraid" in Hebrew can be used to describe "terror" or "awe filled reverence". From the context Jacob being "afraid" seems to be the latter "awe filled reverence". Jacob calls where he slept and dreamt an "awesome place", "house of God", and "gateway to heaven".

“Afraid” in Hebrew can be used to describe “terror”, or “awe filled reverence”.

Verse 18. So Jacob takes the stone that was near his head, sets it up on end, and pours oil over it. This was a common practice in Canaanite worship, according to the IVP Bible Background commentary, and can be seen in such places in Israel today as Tel Gezer. These stones became holy places and served as memorials. We see Jacob repeat this same exact action of erecting a memorial stone later in **Genesis 35:14** where he pours out an offering to the LORD on a stone.



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In **verse 19** Jacob renames the place “Bethel” – which means the “house of God” from **verse 17**. [Note here that where Jacob already had a name, “Luz”- which was a Canaanite site. So it can be seen that Jacob renaming a place, is him in a way already possessing the land. To rename something is to make it your own.] And Jacob renames the place “Bethel. The name “Luz”, meant “almond” or “hard kernel”. Which doesn’t add anything to this story other than remind me that I am hungry.

In the next set of verses we see parts of the Jacob we are familiar with. Jacob, as much as he was in awe of the presence of God at Bethel, in **verse 20-22** is still the distrusting, bargaining Jacob that we saw when he connived Esau out of his birthright. We see the bargaining side of him come out in his conditional faith prayer, it’s as if he is negotiating.

Didn’t God already tell Jacob that he would be with him, protect him, and return him safely? Yes... yet Jacob prayers present as both trusting and distrusting. Can anyone relate?

And now we see the beginning of Jacob's faith journey. We saw the faith journey of Abraham where his faith in the LORD grew till Abraham was obedient at Mount Moriah. Ab was convinced of God's covenant faithfulness. We saw the faith journey of Isaac that began as a fearful man, and the LORD showed him a miraculous 100 fold crop at Gerar and then miraculous wells that brought Isaac to Beersheba where he worships the Lord. Isaac too was in the end convinced of God's covenant faithfulness. And now in the next several chapters we will see the faith journey of Jacob that also ends with him bowing in worship to the LORD, convinced of God's covenant faithfulness. What journey will it take for you to be convinced of God's covenant faithfulness?

Thoughts for meditation and application:

1. In our passage, we saw Isaac the father, bless his son Jacob and give him instruction. This is the pairing of blessing & instruction we see from God. God the Father longs for us his children to have His blessing. His blessing is what empowers or enables obedience to trust him and follow his instructions.

This blessing is divine favor paired with human responsibility. Blessing always comes with responsibility and God gives us what we need to be responsible with what he has given us. His presence, his word, his spirit. Consider your blessings and consider your responsibility.

2. Yet like we saw in these accounts, no one follows the instructions that come with the blessing perfectly – not even close. But God in his covenant faithfulness still brings to completion what he has ordained, despite the messiness of man. And what the LORD brings to completion is us, thru faith in Jesus, together with the LORD for eternity. Does that mean that his children will not get hurt, sick or die here on earth? No, it means that God's covenant faithfulness transcends hurt, sickness, and death.

3. And what we also see is that even when man is only self-serving and evil, God's will for redemption and preserving his people still prevails. That's the story of Jacob's son Joseph and his brothers who sold him into slavery. Joseph later saves the descendants of Jacob (dad, brothers) and all of Egypt from the famine. Joseph understands this principle and he even said to his brothers in **Genesis 50:20** "You intended to harm me, but God...

This is the same principle in the story of Jesus on the cross. Where Satan and the religious leaders thought they were getting rid of Jesus by killing him on a cross, it turned out to be God's plan for a sacrifice that paid for all of mankind's sin. With man's sin paid for, resurrected Jesus in spirit could indwell all his followers turning them in a way into billions of little Jesus here on earth, who would then live with God for eternity. The divine irony of killing one Jesus but creating billions of little Jesuses in the process. And the one they killed resurrects. How brilliant is that plan from God?!

And this same Jesus who said of himself in **John 1:51** that he was the stairway between heaven and earth. That is the exact same phrase from **Genesis 28:12**. What is implied is that there is no action of man that connects earth to heaven, meaning sinful man being in God's presence, unless it's through Jesus. And God initiated that.. He sent Jesus to earth to be that "stairway"! Jesus later tells the disciples in **John 10:7** "I am the gate".

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

1. **Old Testament pairing of words.** The pairing of “blessed” and God giving “commandments” or “instructions” is a common pattern of pairing in the Old Testament. Here are a few other pairings. Righteousness and Justice; Justice and Mercy (Lovingkindness); Truth and Mercy; Truth and Justice.. to name a few. These pairings of words or words and actions serve to reveal to us the character of God and expectations for his children.

2. **The pattern of blessing & instruction** is also the framework to understand **Exodus 19** and **Exodus 20** the Ten Commandments. **Exodus 19:4-6** is the blessing and the giving of the Law in **Exodus 20** and following is the instruction that safeguards the blessing.

3. **Genesis 28:2 “Bethuel”** Interesting thing about the name “Bethuel” is that it means “God is my dwelling place”. I think of a dwelling place as a place of safety, place of rest, place of belonging, it’s “home”. “Bethuel” is very similar to the meaning of “Bethel” meaning “house of God” that we see later in the chapter. Jacob surely needs a dwelling place that is safe, restful, where he belongs, especially after surviving his crazy parents and brother. But will he find that in “Bethuel”? Little did he know that he was walking into the home of another serpent, Laban – but that is next week’s story.

4. **Genesis 28:3-4** And from this point in Genesis through **Genesis 36** the text is mostly about Jacob. To visualize the breakdown of chapters in Genesis Abraham was from **Genesis 12-25**; Isaac Genesis 25-28; Jacob 29-36; Joseph 37-50.

5. **Genesis 28:15-15** What about the holocaust? It’s hard to see the holocaust as fulfillment of **Genesis 28:14-15**, God’s protection and being with them, bringing them home. However I encourage you to consider that much of the bible was written to a collective, a people group and not written to individuals. A collective audience was the norm, individual audience was the exception. That is opposite of how we interpret the bible in the west. So **verse 14-15** was a promise to the descendants as a people group not necessarily individual protection that kept people alive. God’s promise was to keep the people group, the descendants as a whole alive, not individuals, and bring them back to the land of promise. That did indeed happen.

6. **Does this prophecy have more fulfillment?** I think that this promise that is also prophecy is about the Jewish people of Paul’s day living abroad. In the time of Paul many of the Jews that had been in exile or had moved abroad for various reasons, ended up through the blessing of God growing into large Jewish communities and staying where they were in foreign countries. That was true of Paul’s early life where he was raised in a foreign Jewish community. It was also true of Rome and most major cities of that time. These were the ones that Paul went to first when he visited the synagogues of each of those cities in sharing the gospel.

These were called the “diaspora”. A Greek agricultural word that means “scattered seed”.

But it wasn’t just the Jewish descendants of Jacob that became the diaspora – the ones scattered abroad – it was also those who put their faith in Jesus that became the diaspora. It was to these that James wrote his letter. **James 1:1** That word “scattered” is “diaspora”.

So if God told Abraham, Isaac and then Jacob in the end of **Genesis 28:14b** “that all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants” How could all the families of the earth be blessed – meaning “blessed by knowing Jesus” if all the descendants were not scattered. For the families of the world to be blessed by knowing Jesus requires that the descendants of Jacob through salvation by faith be scattered all over the world. This is why Jesus said to the disciples in **Mark 16:15-16**

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

And where do those that know Jesus spend eternity with the LORD? **Revelation 21:2-4** The new Eden that the LORD always wanted them to have. So yes, what the LORD told Jacob in **Genesis 28:15** has been fulfilled in the past already and will be fulfilled in the future as we see in **Revelation 21**. And we have God's assurance of him being with us through all of that.

7. **Genesis 28:22 "Tenth"**. Tithing, a "tenth" was a "tax" paid to kings for their protection and temples for their religious service. Jacob committing a tithe to the LORD was perhaps Jacob saying, "as God shows me his covenant faithfulness I will pay my tax, tithe, to the LORD for his service and protection."