

A STAIRWAY

GENESIS 28:10-22

(Prepared by Gene Thompson using LifeWay's ETB materials.)

1. What is one place that holds special significance for you? (For me it is Ridgecrest, NC. and Six-shooter Resort, OK.)
2. What makes that place so special? (God spoke to me at Ridgecrest and we have had so many special family memories at Six-shooter.)

Many places are important to us because of an experience we had there. In today's study Jacob found a significant place in his life because that's he experienced God there!

Most parents and grandparents are actively involved in the lives of their children and grandchildren from soccer, dance recitals and happily dance in fast versions of "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes." They do this because they love their children and grandchildren.

3. How much more is the love of God for His children?
4. How much more does He desire to be involved in their lives?
5. What would you include in a list of the ways God is actively involved in the lives of His children? (He speaks to us through His Word; speaks through prayer by the Holy Spirit; empowers us to do His will; He is always with us; etc.)

In our study last week, we dealt with Jacob's deception of his father, Isaac, to secure the blessing reserved for the firstborn, Esau. As a result, Esau decided to murder Jacob as soon as their father died. Therefore, Rebecca tells Isaac that she was sick of the Canaanite women and wanted to send Jacob off to her brother to get a wife there, among their relatives. Isaac agrees and so they send Jacob off on this long journey, some 500 or so miles to Haran.

God has the unique ability to use even our bad choices to bring about His will.

In today's study, Jacob discovered God's involvement in his life. As we study today consider how God is at work in your life. I'm afraid that far too often we aren't listening when God speaks to us.

DREAMING! Read Genesis 28:10-12

From Beer-Sheba to Haran is approximately 500 miles and the place where Jacob spent the night was about 80 miles from home. This was probably the second or third night on his journey.

1. What happened to Jacob that night? (In this solitary place, sleep overtook Jacob, and he started dreaming.)

God used dreams many times to convey His message to individuals: Abimelech—Gen. 20:3; Jacob—here; Laban—Gen. 31:24; Joseph; Pharaoh's cupbearer; his baker; Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, Peter, and on and on. In the absence of God's written Word, dreams were often the means God used to speak to people. It was common in that day to lay a stone by their head primarily for protection.

2. How was the ladder described? (Extending from the earth up into heaven with angels going up and down.)

Unlike the tower of Babel, the people tried to build in Genesis 11 to get to heaven, God initiated this interaction.

In John 1:51, after Philip has brought Nathaniel to Jesus, and Nathaniel is at first skeptical, but then Jesus tells him He saw him under the fig tree—this impresses him, and he calls Jesus "the Son of God." But Jesus tells him he will see greater things: "You will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." Jesus was basically saying "I am the ladder to heaven." Just as He is "the way the truth and the life." In John 10 Jesus says, "I am the door; John 14:6 "I am the way," I am the bread," "the living water" and on and on!

3. What significance should we place on dreams? (God can and does speak to us through dreams, especially where the printed Word of God is not available. But He primarily speaks to us through His Word and the Holy Spirit.)

Jacob's dream wasn't just a vision. It also included a message from the Lord!

PROMISED! Read Genesis 28:13-15

1. How was this dream a demonstration of God's grace toward Jacob? (Although he may have heard his parents talking about God's promise to Abraham and Isaac, God had not told him.)
2. What did God say to Jacob? (Yahweh reveals Himself to Jacob and reaffirms the covenant He made with Abraham, promising Jacob—who will later be named Israel—that his offspring will be many and that the Promised Land will one day belong to his descendants. All people on the earth will be blessed through him. He also assured him that He would be with him until everything was accomplished.)
3. When have you felt most alone? (When separated from family and friends. After the loss of a loved one. In a strange place where there may be a lot of people, but I don't know them.)
4. How do you deal with the feelings of aloneness? (Find Christians I can connect with.)
5. How can we help others overcome feeling alone? (Reach out to them. Be aware of people around us who may be alone.)
6. God promised to go with Jacob and to watch over him wherever he went. Is there a loved one for whom you need to claim this promise?

When Jacob woke up, he remembered and responded to his dream.

GATE OF HEAVEN! Read Genesis 28:16-17

1. What was Jacob's response to the realization that He had been in the presence of God? (Jacob responded with reverential fear, awe, and worship!)
2. In what ways might sensing God's presence change a person's perspective? (Realizing God revealed Himself at a particular place would make us have special feelings about that place. But we must be careful that we worship God and not the place He revealed Himself to us.)
3. When have you felt specifically aware of God's presence in your life?
4. How did those experiences change you?
5. How did it change the way you relate to others?
6. What are some things you can do to become more sensitive to His word in your life? (Stay sensitive to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.)
7. What might keep you from recognizing God's presence? (Cold heart.)

Genuine experiences with God always change us. We cannot spend time with Him without being transformed. That's what Jacob was beginning to realize, as well.

THE VOW! Read Genesis 28:18-22

Jacob worshiped when he woke up in the morning. He called the place Bethel— "house of God." It would come to be a prominent place in Old Testament Israel.

Jacob makes a vow that if God is going to do what He said He would do then I'll do the following.

1. What three things did Jacob vow to God? ("Then the LORD will be my God." "This stone...will be God's house." And "I will surely give a tenth to You.")
2. Is there a special place for you, where God has spoken to you? (Perhaps a church camp like Falls Creek, where a few years ago the IMB said more Southern Baptist missionaries had made their commitment to missions at the altar at Falls Creek, than at any other one spot in the country.)

Notice Jacob talks about tithing a tenth of all God blesses him with, and this is long before the law came about.

Jacob offered God his vow as confidence in God's promise.

3. How should we respond to God's faithfulness to His promises? (Faithful in our obedience!)

Jacob's experience assures us that believers can experience the joy of God's presence and live in assurance of His faithfulness. Sometimes, He reaches out to us when we least expect it, but He is always working in our lives.

CHALLENGE!

1. What are some ways we can become more sensitive to seeing Him at work in the ordinary affairs of life? (Ask God to help us be more sensitive to His Holy Spirit.)
2. How does the assurance of God's presence give you joy? (It is difficult to explain. For me it is a deep peace.)