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Jacob Saw a Stairway with the Angels of God Ascending and Descending 28: 10-22

Jacob saw a stairway with the Angels of God ascending and descending DIG: What is so remarkable in ADONAI's display of grace? Why does God meet Jacob unsolicited and without criticism?

REFLECT: Do you think God still speaks through dreams? What are the inherent dangers of relying on dreams for guidance? Do you believe, beyond any doubt, that the Lord will care for you?

Parashah 7: vaYetze (He went out) 28:10-32:2

(see my commentary on Deuteronomy, to see link click [Af](#) - Parashah)

The Key People include **Jacob**, **Rachel**, **Laban**, **Leah**, **handmaids** and **sons**. The main character of parashah vaYetze is **Jacob**. This portion begins as **Jacob** is busy packing **his** bags to flee from **his** angry brother, **Esau**; and closes with **Jacob** fleeing again, but this time from **his** angry father-in-law and uncle, **Laban**. Amid **his** journeys, we see **Jacob** pitted in a battle of wits with his father-in-law **Laban** in whom there is much guile.

The Scenes include **Beersheba**, **Bethel**, **Haran**, **Galeed**, and **Mahanaim**.

The Main Events include **Jacob's** escape, **his** dream of angels ascending and descending on a stairway to heaven, **God's** promise of family and land, **Jacob's** response to **build an altar** and **tithe**, 20 years of work (7 for **Leah**, 7 for **Rachel**, and 6 for **livestock**), 11 **sons** born to **him**, **livestock** increase, **dream** warning **Jacob** to return home, a fast getaway while **Laban** chases, **the family gods** stolen by **Rachel**, **the covenant** between **Jacob** and **Laban** at **Galeed**, and **angels** greeting **Jacob** at **Mahanaim**.

Jacob left **Beersheba** and set out for **Haran** with only a staff in **his** hand (28:10). He had spent most of **his** life in **Beersheba** (22:19, 26:33, 28:10). It was five hundred miles to **Haran**, and even though **he** probably had a camel or a donkey to ride on, it would take

him weeks to get there. **Bethel** is twelve miles north of Jerusalem and **Beersheba**, which is thirty miles south of Jerusalem. So **Jacob** (Hebrew: **Ya'akov**) covered about forty miles **his** first day. Wow, **he** really wanted to get away from Esau in a hurry!

When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set.

It almost sounds like **Jacob** reached this **certain place** by chance. But nothing could be further from the truth. **The LORD** led **him** there, whether **Ya'akov** knew it or not.

He called the **place**, **Beit-El** or **Bethel**, which means *the house of God*. Many years earlier **his** grandfather **Abraham** had **built an altar to ADONAI** there as an act of public worship (12:8). It is twelve hundred feet above sea level in the hills, and it is a bleak and desolate place. Yet this would become the high point in **his** spiritual life.

Taking one of the stones there, he put it near his head and lay down to sleep

(28:11). **He** didn't really use it as a pillow; the Hebrew literally reads *near his head*. The same terminology is used in 1 Samuel 26:7, where **Saul** fell **asleep with his spear stuck in the ground near his head**. What do you think **Jacob** was feeling? **He** was probably lonely and homesick. As far as we know, this was **his** first night away from home and **Jacob** thought **he** was all alone. How wrong **he** was. The point of the account is that **God** was present with **him** wherever **he** went, and chose this **place** to make **Himself** known to **Jacob**. The means **He** used was **a stairway**.

It was only when **he** was **asleep**, needy and helpless, that **God** revealed **Himself**.⁴⁵¹ **He had a dream in which he saw a stairway (28:12a)**, *asullam*, which appears only here in the Hebrew text. **Ya'akov** trusted the promises of **the LORD** all **his** life. **He** worshiped **ADONAI** and prayed to **Him** regularly. But **God** had never actually appeared and spoken to **him** as **He** had to **his** grandfather **Abraham** and **his** father **Isaac**. But on this night **Jacob** would meet **ADONAI** as a theophany, in the form of **a dream**. A theophany is a pre-incarnate appearance of **Jesus Christ**. It was obvious that this was no ordinary **staircase**.



This **stairway** was **resting on the earth**, where **Jacob** was, **with its top**, *literally head, reaching to heaven*, where **ADONAI** was. So the **dream** pictures **Ya'akov** having access to heaven. **And the angels of God** were there with **him (28:12b)**. In the book of **Genesis**, the phrase, **the angels of God**, is found in only two places, here and **32:1**. What is significant in both instances is the timing. Here, **the angels of God** are mentioned as **Jacob** *departs from the Land*, and in **32:1** they are mentioned again as **he** *is returning to the Land*. These **angels of God** are pictured as **ascending and descending on a stairway (28:12c)**.

Almost two thousand years in the future from **Jacob's** day, a devout Israelite named **Nathanael** was meditating under a **fig tree** on **God's** word. In those days it was impossible for everyone to have a copy of the Scriptures so they spent a lot of time memorizing it, and then meditating on it. **The rabbis said that the best place to meditate and receive a blessing from the LORD was under a fig tree. In fact, some rabbis would teach under a fig tree because they said the Scriptures could be better understood there.**

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, He said to him: Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false. Nathanael wanted to know how Yeshua knew him. He answered: **I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.** Then Nathanael said a very curious thing. He said: **Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel (Yochanan 1:47-49).** Nathanael did not believe that **Jesus** was **the Son of God** simply because **He** knew that **he** was mediating under a **fig tree**. Today, if someone said, "I saw in a vision that you were at Temple on Shabbat," you wouldn't think he was a prophet, because Temple is where you would expect to find the righteous of the TaNaKh on Shabbat.

So during the time of **Christ** you would have expected to find a Jew meditating under a **fig**

tree. So what made **Nathanael** believe in **Yeshua**? It was the first statement: **Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false**. *Jesus knew the exact chapter Nathanael was meditating on.* It was **Genesis 28**. But if **Nathanael** was **a true Israelite in whom there was nothing false**, by implication, who was the **Israelite in whom** there was much **guile** (NKJ)? It was **Laban, Jacob's** deceitful uncle (**28:2-5**). How can we be sure **Yeshua** knew **Nathanael** was meditating on **Genesis 28**? **Jesus** then said: **You shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man** (**John 1:51**). This was the exact vision that **Jacob** had seen in his **dream**. In other words, **Jesus** claimed to be the **stairway**, the only means to get from earth to heaven: **For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Yeshua the Messiah** (**First Timothy 2:5**).

Then **ADONAI** reconfirms the provisions of **God's** covenant with **Jacob's** grandfather **Abraham**. **There above it stood the LORD, and He said to Ya'akov, "I am ADONAI the God of your father, or descendant, Abraham and the God of Isaac"** (**28:13a**). There were four aspects of the Covenant. First, **I will give you, Jacob, and your descendants the land on which you are lying** (**28:13b**). The mere mention of **descendants** means that **Jacob** will succeed in finding a wife.

Second, **Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south** (**28:14a**). He and his future wife will be very fruitful and will have so many **descendants**, that they **will be** as numerous as **the dust of the earth**. Third, **he** had the promise of Gentile blessing: **All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring** (**28:14b**).

Fourth, there are personal promises to **Jacob**. **ADONAI's** presence: **I am with you**. **El Shaddai's** protection: **I will watch over you wherever you go**. **The LORD's** promise: **I will bring you back to this land**. And finally, **God's** personal commitment: **I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you** (**28:15**). Notice that **ADONAI** did not say anything negative to **him** at all because **Jacob was a righteous man** (**25:27**). If you are a believer in **Jesus Christ**, the fact that **He will not leave you until He has done what He has promised you** is probably the most precious promise that you can get out of the Bible.

Ya'akov, the man, may not have understood the full implications of **his** remarkable **dream**, but **he** surely could understand that there was communication between man and **God**, and that **the LORD** would provide the means by which man could be restored to **Him**. Personally, **he** learned that beyond any doubt, **ADONAI** would care for **him** and that

regardless of future circumstances, **El Shaddai** would lead **him** and fulfill all **His** promises.⁴⁵²

After **ADONAI** had finished speaking, **Jacob awoke from his sleep**, although it seemed to **him** to be much more than an dream. **Jacob's** reaction was such that **he** believed that **YHVH** had actually appeared and spoken to **him**. When **he** ran away from home, **he** had had a limited view of **the LORD**. **He** thought that when **he** ran away from home, **he** was running away from **God**. But **he** found that **he** had not left **God** back home. **Jacob** exclaimed: **Surely ADONAI is in this place, and I was not aware of it (28:16).**⁴⁵³ **He was afraid** in the sense that **he** started to understand the power of **Elohim**. **Jacob** was growing in **his** faith because **the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10)**. **He** said: **How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven (28:17).**

*This was **Jacob's** first encounter with **God**. **His** was not a mature faith like **Abraham's**, but nonetheless, it was a step in the right direction for **Jacob**. After all, **Abraham** had several lapses of faith before he became a mature believer. **The LORD** had taught **him** as **he** matured, and **He** would do the same with **Ya'akov**. **He** does the same with us.*

Jacob established several motifs pertaining to Jewish worship here at Bethel. The most notable is the memorial. Early the next morning **Ya'akov** took the stone **he** had placed near his head and set it up, literally stood it up, as a pillar. **He** did not have an animal to sacrifice, but **he** did make a drink offering (Exodus 29:40-41; Leviticus 23:13 and 18) by pouring oil on top, literally the head, of it (28:18). **This was the first use of a drink offering in the Scriptures.** Later, under the Torah, the drink offering would always be made of wine and would symbolize joy. It would not be offered alone, but always in conjunction with the sweet-savor offerings (Numbers 15:1-13), especially the burnt offering and its accompanying meal offering. It was never to be offered with the sin or guilt offerings because there would be no joy for **ADONAI** in **Messiah's** sufferings when **He** was made sin upon the cross (see my commentary on Exodus, to see link click [Fb](#) - The Five Offerings of the Tabernacle: Christ, Our Sacrificial Offering).

Setting up stones as a pillar also became important from this time on. Memorials are different from altars. They were set up to recall where **God** had dealt with man, so that people would learn about **Him** when they asked: **What do these stones mean (Joshua 4:6)?** **Moses would set up twelve stone pillars (Exodus 24:4).** **Jacob** called the place **Bethel**, though the city used to be called **Luz (28:19)**. **Luz**, its original name, meant

separation, while **Beit-El** or **Bethel** (its new name), means *the House of God*. **ADONAI** calls us to be *separate from the world*, but in leaving the world we enter His house.⁴⁵⁴

Jacob's vow was another motif. Then Ya'akov made a vow, the first recorded in Scripture, saying: since **God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then ADONAI will be my God. And this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house; in other words, this will be the place where Jacob will return to worship the LORD (28:20-22a).** About twenty years later, the LORD would tell **Jacob** to return to **Bethel** (see [Ih - Jacob's Journey to Bethel](#)).

Tithing was another motif. In addition to setting up stones as a pillar, **Jacob** responded to the appearance of **ADONAI** by making a vow of service to **Him**, saying: **And of all that you give me, I will give you a tenth (28:22b).** Like his grandfather **Abraham**, who had given tithes to **Melchizedek (14:40)**, **Jacob** acknowledged that everything he had belonged to **God**. These were both voluntary gifts. **God** did not command them. Later, tithing would become an obligation under the Torah (**Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:21-24**). Today, believers should tithe and it should be done cheerfully and gratefully, not grudgingly or with a selfish attitude (**Second Corinthians 9:7**). The New Covenant contains no command for specified amounts or percentages of giving. We need to support those who feed us spiritually (**Matthew 10:5-11; Luke 9:1-5; John 12:6 and 13:29; First Timothy 5:17-18**), but after that the percentage we give will be determined by the love of our own hearts and the needs of others (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Do - When You Give to the Needy, Do Not Do It to be Honored by Others](#)). We do not have to take on the yoke of the Torah.

It seems, then, the main reason for this **dream** was to encourage **Jacob** in his journey out of **the Promised Land**. It assured him that **the LORD** was to be with him in his time in **Haran** and that, by His sovereign grace, He would bring him back home to **Canaan**. Judging from what **Jacob** would experience in **Haran**, he would need all the encouragement he could get!

In **Jacob's** dream, **ADONAI** came to earth. Indeed, the Bible often repeats this refrain. But **God** comes to other runaways as well. This is, in fact, **the LORD's** defining purpose; He comes to rebellious people to be with them and to save them. When **El Shaddai** finally decided to become a **Person** to seek and save the lost, He was given the name: **God with us (Mt 1:23)**. **Jacob** was forced to respond to **ADONAI's** coming, and so are we.⁴⁵⁵