

# CHAPTER 28

We have here,

**I.** Jacob parting with his parents, to go to Padanaram; the charge his father gave him (v. 1, 2), the blessing he sent him away with (v. 3, 4), his obedience to the orders given him (v. 5, 10), and the influence this had upon Esau (v. 6-9).

**II.** Jacob meeting with God, and his communion with him by the way. And there,

1. his vision of the ladder (v. 11, 12).
2. The gracious promises God made him (v. 13-15).
3. The impression this made upon him (v. 16-19).
4. The vow he made to God, upon this occasion (v. 20, etc.).

## GENESIS 28:1-5

### JACOB DISMISSED WITH A BLESSING

Jacob had no sooner obtained the blessing than immediately he was forced to flee from his country; and, as it if were not enough that he was a stranger and sojourner there, he must go to be more so, and no better than an exile, in another country. Now *Jacob fled into Syria*, ~~AND~~ Hosea 12:12. He was blessed with plenty of corn and wine, and yet he went away poor, was blessed with government, and yet went out to service, a hard service. This was,

1. Perhaps to correct him for his dealing fraudulently with his father. The blessing shall be confirmed to him, and yet he shall smart for the indirect course he took to obtain it. While there is such an alloy as there is of sin in our duties, we must expect an alloy of trouble in our comforts. However,
2. It was to teach us that those who inherit the blessing must expect persecution; those who have peace in Christ shall have tribulation in the world, ~~AND~~ John 16:33. Being told of his before, we must not think it strange, and, being assured of a recompence hereafter, we must not think it hard. We may observe, likewise, that God's providences often seem to contradict his promises, and to go cross to them; and yet, when the

mystery of God shall be finished, we shall see that all was for the best, and that cross providences did but render the promises and the accomplishment of them the more illustrious. Now Jacob is here dismissed by his father,

**I.** With a solemn charge: *He blessed him, and charged him*, v. 1, 2. Note, Those that have the blessing must keep the charge annexed to it, and not think to separate what God has joined. The charge is like that in <sup><404></sup>2 Corinthians 6:14, *Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers*; and all that inherit the promises of the remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, must keep this charge, which follows those promises, *Save yourselves from this untoward generation*, <sup><405></sup>Acts 2:38-40. Those that are entitled to peculiar favours must be a peculiar people. If Jacob be an heir of promise, he must *not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan*; those that profess religion should not marry those that are irreligious.

**II.** With a solemn blessing, v. 3, 4. He had before blessed him unwittingly; now he does it designedly, for the greater encouragement of Jacob in that melancholy condition to which he was now removing. This blessing is more express and full than the former; it is an entail of the blessing of Abraham, that blessing which was poured on the head of Abraham like the anointing oil, thence to run down to his chosen seed, as the skirts of his garments. It is a gospel blessing, the blessing of church-privileges, that is the blessing of Abraham, which upon the Gentiles through faith, <sup><406></sup>Galatians 3:14. It is a blessing from God Almighty, by which name God appeared to the patriarchs, <sup><407></sup>Exodus 6:3. Those are blessed indeed whom God Almighty blesses; for he commands and effects the blessing. Two great promises Abraham was blessed with, and Isaac here entails them both upon Jacob.

**1.** The promise of heirs: *God make thee fruitful, and multiply thee*, v. 3.

**(1.)** Through his loins should descend from Abraham that people who should be numerous as the stars of heaven, and the sand of the sea, and who should increase more than the rest of the nations, so as to be *an assembly of people*, as the margin reads it. And never was such a multitude of people so often gathered into one assembly as the tribes of Israel were in the wilderness, and afterwards.

**(2.)** Through his loins should descend from Abraham that person in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed, and to whom the gathering

of the people should be. Jacob had in him a multitude of people indeed, for all things in heaven and earth are united in Christ (~~401D~~Ephesians 1:10), all centre in him, that corn of wheat, which falling to the ground, produced much fruit, ~~482A~~John 12:24.

2. The promise of an inheritance for those heirs: *That thou mayest inherit the land of thy sojournings*, v. 4. Canaan was hereby entailed upon the seed of Jacob, exclusive of the seed of Esau. Isaac was now sending Jacob away into a distant country, to settle there for some time; and, lest this should look like disinheriting him, he here confirms the settlement of it upon him, that he might be assured that the discontinuance of his possession should be no defeasance of his right. Observe, He is here told that he should inherit the land wherein he sojourned. Those that are sojourners now shall be heirs for ever: and, even now, those do most inherit the earth (though they do not inherit most of it) that are most like strangers in it. Those have the best enjoyment of present things that sit most loose to them. This promise looks as high as heaven, of which Canaan was a type. This was the better country, which Jacob, with the other patriarchs, had in his eye, when he confessed himself a stranger and pilgrim upon the earth, ~~58113~~Hebrews 11:13.

Jacob, having taken leave of his father, was hastened away with all speed, lest his brother should find an opportunity to do him a mischief, and away he went to Padan-aram, v. 5. How unlike was his taking a wife thence to his father's! Isaac had servants and camels sent to fetch his; Jacob must go himself, go alone, and go afoot, to fetch his: he must go too in a fright from his father's house, not knowing when he might return. Note, If God, in his providence, disable us, we must be content, though we cannot keep up the state and grandeur of our ancestors. We should be more in care to maintain their piety than to maintain their dignity, and to be as good as they were than to be as great. Rebekah is here called *Jacob's and Esau's mother*. Jacob is named first, not only because he had always been his mother's darling, but because he was now make his father's heir, and Esau was, in this sense, set aside. Note, The time will come when piety will have precedence, whatever it has now.

## GENESIS 28:6-9

### JACOB DISMISSED WITH A BLESSING

This passage concerning Esau comes in in the midst of Jacob's story, either,

**1.** To show the influence of a good example. Esau, though the greater man, now begins to think Jacob the better man, and disdains not to take him for his pattern in this particular instance of marrying with a daughter of Abraham. The elder children should give to the younger an example of tractableness and obedience; it is bad if they do not: but it is some alleviation if they take the example of it from them, as Esau here did from Jacob. Or,

**2.** To show the folly of an after-wit. Esau did well, but he did it when it was too late, He *saw that the daughters of Canaan pleased not his father*, and he might have seen that long ago if he had consulted his father's judgment as much as he did his palate. And how did he now mend the matter? Why, truly, so as to make bad worse.

**(1.)** He married a daughter of Ishmael, the son of the bond-woman, who was cast out, and was not to inherit with Isaac and his seed, thus joining with a family which God had rejected, and seeking to strengthen his own pretensions by the aid of another pretender.

**(2.)** He took a third wife, while, for aught that appears, his other two were neither dead nor divorced.

**(3.)** He did it only to please his father, not to please God. Now that Jacob was sent into a far country Esau would be all in all at home, and he hoped so to humour his father as to prevail with him to make a new will, and entail the promise upon him, revoking the settlement lately made upon Jacob. And thus,

**[1.]** He was wise when it was too late, like Israel that would venture when the decree had gone forth against them (<sup>(9140)</sup>Numbers 14:40), and the foolish virgins, <sup>(4251)</sup>Matthew 25:11.

**[2.]** He rested in a partial reformation, and thought, by pleasing his parents in one thing, to atone for all his other miscarriages. It is not said that when

he saw how obedient Jacob was, and how willing to please his parents, he repented of his malicious design against him: no, it appeared afterwards that he persisted in that, and retained his malice. Note, Carnal hearts are apt to think themselves as good as they should be, because perhaps, in some one particular instance, they are not so bad as they have been. Thus Micah retains his idols, but thinks himself happy in having a Levite to be his priest, <sup>1773</sup>Judges 17:13.

## <sup>1780</sup> GENESIS 28:10-15

### JACOB'S VISION AT BETH-EL

We have here Jacob upon his journey towards Syria, in a very desolate condition, like one that was sent to seek his fortune; but we find that, though he was alone, yet he was not alone, for *the Father was with him*, <sup>1762</sup>John 16:32. If what is here recorded happened (as it should seem it did) the first night, he had made a long day's journey from Beersheba to Bethel, above forty miles. Providence brought him to a convenient place, probably shaded with trees, to rest himself in that night; and there he had,

**I.** A hard lodging (v. 11), the *stones for his pillows*, and the heavens for his canopy and curtains. As the usage then was, perhaps this was not so bad as it seems how to us; but we should think, 1. He lay very cold, the cold ground for his bed, and, which one would suppose made the matter worse, a cold stone for his pillow, and in the cold air.

**2.** Very uneasy. If his bones were sore with his day's journey, his night's rest would but make them sorer.

**3.** Very much exposed. He forgot that he was fleeing for his life; or had his brother, in his rage, pursued, or sent a murderer after him, here he lay ready to be sacrificed, and destitute of shelter and defence. We cannot think it was by reason of his poverty that he was so ill accommodated, but,

**(1.)** It was owing to the plainness and simplicity of those times, when men did not take so much state, and consult their ease so much, as in these later times of softness and effeminacy.

(2.) Jacob had been particularly used to hardships, as a plain man dwelling in tents; and, designing now to go to service, he was the more willing to inure himself to them; and, as it proved, it was well, <sup><B34></sup>Genesis 31:40.

(3.) His comfort in the divine blessing, and his confidence in the divine protection, made him easy, even when he lay thus exposed; being sure that his God made him to dwell in safety, he could lie down and sleep upon a stone.

**II.** In his hard lodging he had a pleasant dream. Any Israelite indeed would be willing to take up with Jacob's pillow, provided he might but have Jacob's dream. Then, and there, he *heard the words of God, and saw the visions of the Almighty*. It was the best night's sleep he ever had in his life. Note, God's time to visit his people with his comforts is when they are most destitute of other comforts, and other comforters; when afflictions in the way of duty (as these were) do abound, then shall consolations so much the more abound. Now observe here,

**1.** The encouraging vision Jacob saw, v. 12. He saw a ladder which reached from earth to heaven, the angels ascending and descending upon it, and God himself at the head of it. Now this represents the two things that are very comfortable to good people at all times, and in all conditions:

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(1.) The providence of God, by which there is a constant correspondence kept up between heaven and earth. The counsels of heaven are executed on earth, and the actions and affairs of this earth are all known in heaven are executed on earth, and the actions and affairs of this earth are all known in heaven and judged there. Providence does its work gradually, and by steps. Angels are employed as ministering spirits, to serve all the purposes and designs of Providence, and the wisdom of God is at the upper end of the ladder, directing all the motions of second causes to the glory of the first Cause. The angels are active spirits, continually ascending and descending; they rest not, day nor night, from service, according to the posts assigned them. They ascend, to give account of what they have done, and to receive orders; and then descend, to execute the orders they have received. Thus we should always abound in the work of the Lord, that we may do it as the angels do it, <sup><B33D></sup>Psalm 103:20, 21. This vision gave very seasonable comfort to Jacob, letting him know that he had both a good guide and a good guard, in his going out and coming in, — that, though he

was made to wander from his father's house, yet still he was the care of a kind Providence, and the charge of the holy angels. This is comfort enough, though we should not admit the notion which some have, that the tutelar angels of Canaan were ascending, having guarded Jacob out of their land, and the angels of Syria descending to take him into their custody. Jacob was now the type and representative of the whole church, with the guardianship of which the angels are entrusted.

**(2.)** The mediation of Christ. He is this ladder, the foot on earth in his human nature, the top in heaven in his divine nature: or the former in his humiliation, the latter in his exaltation. All the intercourse between heaven and earth, since the fall, is by this ladder. Christ is the way; all God's favours come to us, and all our services go to him, by Christ. If God dwell with us, and we with him, it is by Christ. We have no way of getting to heaven, but by this ladder; if we climb up any other way we are thieves and robbers. To this vision our Saviour alludes when he speaks of the angels of God *ascending and descending upon the son of man* (~~¶~~John 1:51); for the kind offices the angels do us, and the benefits we receive by their ministration, are all owing to Christ, who has reconciled things on earth and things in heaven (~~¶~~Colossians 1:20), and made them all meet in himself, ~~¶~~Ephesians 1:10.

**2.** The encouraging words Jacob heard. God now brought him into the wilderness, and spoke comfortably to him, spoke from the head of the ladder; for all the glad tidings we receive from heaven come through Jesus Christ.

**(1.)** The former promises made to his father were repeated and ratified to him, v. 13, 14. In general, God intimated to him that he would be the same to him that he had been to Abraham and Isaac. Those that tread in the steps of their godly parents are interested in their covenant and entitled to their privileges. Particularly,

**[1.]** The land of Canaan is settled upon him, *the land whereon thou liest*; as if by his lying so contentedly upon the bare ground he had taken livery and seisin of the whole land.

**[2.]** It is promised him that his posterity should multiply exceedingly as the dust of the earth — that, though he seemed now to be plucked off as a withered branch, yet he should become a flourishing tree, that should send out his boughs unto the sea. These were the blessings with which his

father had blessed him (v. 3, 4), and God here said Amen to them, that he might have strong consolation.

[3.] It is added that the Messiah should come from his loins, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. Christ is the great blessing of the world. All that are blessed, whatever family they are of, are blessed in him, and none of any family are excluded from blessedness in him, but those that exclude themselves.

(2.) Fresh promises were made him, accommodated to his present condition, v. 15.

[1.] Jacob was apprehensive of danger from his brother Esau; but God promises to keep him. Note, Those are safe whom god protects, whoever pursues them.

[2.] He had now a long journey before him, had to travel alone, in an unknown road, to an unknown country; but, *behold, I am with thee*, says God. Note, Wherever we are, we are safe, and may be easy, if we have God's favourable presence with us.

[3.] He knew not, but God foresaw, what hardships he should meet with in his uncle's service, and therefore promises to preserve him in all places. Note, God knows how to give his people graces and comforts accommodated to the events that shall be, as well as to those that are.

[4.] He was now going as an exile into a place far distant, but God promises him to bring him back again to this land. Note, He that preserves his people's going out will also take care of their coming in, ~~1008~~ Psalm 121:8.

[5.] He seemed to be forsaken of all his friends, but God here gives him this assurance, *I will not leave thee*. Note, Whom God loves he never leaves. This promise is sure to all the seed, ~~835~~ Hebrews 13:5.

[6.] Providences seemed to contradict the promises; he is therefore assured of the performance of them in their season: All shall *be done that I have spoken to thee of*. Note, Saying and doing are not two things with God, whatever they are with us.



## GENESIS 28:16-22

### JACOB'S VOW

God manifested himself and his favour to Jacob when he was asleep and purely passive; for the spirit, like the wind, blows when and where he listeth, and God's grace, like the dew, tarrieth not for the sons of men, <sup><381></sup>Micah 5:7. 5:7. But Jacob applied himself to the improvement of the visit God had made him when he was awake; and we may well think he awaked, as the prophet did (<sup><281></sup>Jeremiah 31:26), and behold his sleep was sweet to him. Here is much of Jacob's devotion on this occasion.

**I.** He expressed a great surprise at the tokens he had of God's special presence with him in that place: *Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not*, v. 16. Note,

**1.** God's manifestations of himself to his people carry their own evidence along with them. God can give undeniable demonstrations of his presence, such as give abundant satisfaction to the souls of the faithful that God is with them of a truth, satisfaction not communicable to others, but convincing to themselves.

**2.** We sometimes meet with God where we little thought of meeting with him. He is where we did not think he had been, is found where we asked not for him. No place excludes divine visits (<sup><163></sup>Genesis 16:13, *here also*); wherever we are, in the city or in the desert, in the house or in the field, in the shop or in the street, we may keep up our intercourse with Heaven if it be not our own fault.

**II.** It struck an awe upon him (v. 17): *He was afraid*; so far was he from being puffed up, and exalted above measure, with the abundance of the revelations (<sup><411></sup>2 Corinthians 12:7), that he was afraid. Note, The more we see of God the more cause we see for holy trembling and blushing before him. Those to whom God is pleased to manifest himself are thereby laid, and kept, very low in their own eyes, and see cause to fear even the Lord and his goodness, <sup><385></sup>Hosea 3:5. He said, *How dreadful is this place!* that is, "The appearance of God in this place is never to be thought of, but with a holy awe and reverence. I shall have a respect for this place, and remember it by this token, as long as I live:" not that he thought the place itself any nearer the divine visions than other places; but what he saw there

at this time was, as it were, *the house of God*, the residence of the divine Majesty, and *the gate of heaven*, that is, the general rendezvous of the inhabitants of the upper world, as the meetings of a city were in their gates; or the angels ascending and descending were like travellers passing and re-passing through the gates of a city. Note,

**1.** God is in a special manner present where his grace is revealed and where his covenants are published and sealed, as of old by the ministry of angels, so now by instituted ordinances, <sup><18></sup>Matthew 28:20.

**2.** Where God meets us with his special presence we ought to meet him with the most humble reverence, remembering his justice and holiness, and our own meanness and vileness.

**III.** He took care to preserve the memorial of it two ways:

**1.** He set up the stone for a pillar (v. 18); not as if he thought the visions of his head were any way owing to the stone on which it lay, but thus he would mark the place against he came back, and erect a lasting monument of God's favour to him, and because he had not time now to build an altar here, as Abraham did in the places where God appeared to him, <sup><19></sup>Genesis 12:7. He therefore *poured oil on the top of this stone*, which probably was the ceremony then used in dedicating their altars, as an earnest of his building an altar when he should have conveniences for it, as afterwards he did, in gratitude to God for this vision, <sup><20></sup>Genesis 35:7. Note, Grants of mercy call for returns of duty, and the sweet communion we have with God ought ever to be remembered.

**2.** He gave a new name to the place, v. 19. It had been called *Luz*, an *almond-tree*; but he will have it henceforward called *Beth-el*, *the house of God*. This gracious appearance of God to him put a greater honour upon it, and made it more remarkable, than all the almond-trees that flourished there. This is that *Beth-el* where, long after, it is said, *God found Jacob, and there* (in what he said to him) *he spoke with us*, <sup><21></sup>Hosea 12:4. In process of time, this *Beth-el*, *the house of God*, became *Beth-aven*, *a house of vanity* and iniquity, when Jeroboam set up one of his calves there.

**IV.** He made a solemn vow upon this occasion, v. 20-22. By religious vows we give glory to God, own our dependence upon him, and lay a bond upon our own souls to engage and quicken our obedience to him. Jacob was now in fear and distress; and it is seasonable to make vows in times of

trouble, or when we are in pursuit of any special mercy, <sup><3116></sup>Jonah 1:16; <sup><4613></sup>Psalms 66:13, 14; <sup><9011></sup>1 Samuel 1:11; <sup><9021></sup>Numbers 21:1-3. Jacob had now had a gracious visit from heaven. God had renewed his covenant with him, and the covenant is mutual. When God ratifies his promises to us, it is proper for us to repeat our promises to him. Now in this vow observe,

**1.** Jacob's faith. God had said (v. 15), *I am with thee, and will keep thee*. Jacob takes hold of this, and infers, "*Seeing God will be with me, and will keep me*, as he hath said, and (which is implied in that promise) will provide comfortably for me, — and seeing he has promised to *bring me again to this land*, that is, *to the house of my father*, whom I hope to find alive at my return *in peace*" (so unlike was he to Esau who longed for the days of mourning for his father), — "I depend upon it." Note, God's promises are to be the guide and measure of our desires and expectations.

**2.** Jacob's modesty and great moderation in his desires. He will cheerfully content himself with bread to eat, and raiment to put on; and, though God's promise had now made him heir to a very great estate, yet he indents not for soft clothing and dainty meat. Agur's wish is his, *Feed me with food convenient for me*; and see <sup><3068></sup>1 Timothy 6:8. Nature is content with a little, and grace with less. Those that have most have, in effect, no more for themselves than food and raiment; of the overplus they have only either the keeping or the giving, not the enjoyment: if God give us more, we are bound to be thankful, and to use it for him; if he give us but this, we are bound to be content, and cheerfully to enjoy him in it.

**3.** Jacob's piety, and his regard to God, which appear here,

**(1.)** In what he desired, that God would be with him and keep him. Note, We need desire no more to make us easy and happy, wherever we are, than to have God's presence with us and to be under his protection. It is comfortable, in a journey, to have a guide in an unknown way, a guard in a dangerous way, to be well carried, well provided for, and to have good company in any way; and those that have God with them have all this in the best manner.

**(2.)** In what he designed. His resolution is,

**[1.]** In general, to cleave to the Lord, as his God in covenant: *Then shall the Lord be my God*. Not as if he would disown him and cast him off if he should want food and raiment; no, though he slay us, we must cleave to

him; but “then I will rejoice in him as my God; then I will more strongly engage myself to abide with him.” Note, Every mercy we receive from God should be improved as an additional obligation upon us to walk closely with him as our God.

[2.] In particular, that he would perform some special acts of devotion, in token of his gratitude. *First*, “This pillar shall keep possession here till I come back in peace, and then it shall be God’s house,” that is, “an altar shall be erected here to the honour of God.” *Secondly*, “The house of god shall not be unfurnished, nor his altar without a sacrifice: *Of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee*, to be spent either upon God’s altars or upon his poor,” both which are his receivers in the world. Probably it was according to some general instructions received from heaven that Abraham and Jacob offered the tenth of their acquisitions to God. Note, 1. God must be honoured with our estates, and must have his dues out of them. When we receive more than ordinary mercy from God we should study to give some signal instances of gratitude to him.

**2.** The tenth is a very fit proportion to be devoted to God and employed for him, though, as circumstances vary, it may be more or less, as God prospers us, ~~1~~1 Corinthians 16:2; ~~2~~2 Corinthians 9:7.