

Genesis Chapter 28 - Commentary By Mike Wells

Chapter 28 Overview:

Overview of Genesis 28: The following chapter presents Jacob at Bethel. There God confirmed to him the covenant He had made with Abraham. The chapter has these subdivisions: (1) Isaac sends Jacob to Padan-aram in verses 1-5. (2) Esau marries the daughter of Ishmael in verses 6-9. (3) The vision of Jacob's ladder is presented in verses 10-19, and, (4) the vow Jacob made to God in verses 20-22.

Genesis 28 : 1-4 - And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. 2 Arise, go to Padanaram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother. 3 And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; 4 And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham.

- Isaac therefore called in Jacob and straitly enjoined him not to marry a Canaanite wife.
- Rather, he ordered his son to go back to their family heritage at Padan-aram (which literally means 'the plains of Aram' which were in Syria where Laban dwelt).
- Isaac told Jacob to go there and take a wife of the "daughters of Laban, thy mother's brother."
- Intra-familial marriage was socially permissible. In this case, what was suggested was the marriage of a cousin.
- Isaac therefore blessed his son one final time.
- He said, "And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham."
- It is clear that Isaac had come to understand that it was through Jacob that the Abrahamic covenant would flow.
- He therefore invoked that blessing upon him.
- Moreover, Isaac reminded Jacob that his seed would someday inherit the land which God had promised Abraham.
- Moreover, it is of interest that Isaac noted, Jacob was still a stranger in that land.
- He was now a third generation inhabitant yet was still a stranger (i.e., foreigner) therein.
- The full possession of the land would not take place until the time of Joshua hundreds of years later.

Genesis 28 : 5 - And Isaac sent away Jacob: and he went to Padanaram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.

- Jacob therefore departed and headed for Padan-aram in Syria.

Genesis 28 : 6-9 - When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob, and sent him away to Padanaram, to take him a wife from thence; and that as he blessed him he gave him a

charge, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan; 7 And that Jacob obeyed his father and his mother, and was gone to Padanaram; 8 And Esau seeing that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father; 9 Then went Esau unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife.

- Esau was aware of the recent happenings with his brother.
- He also was aware that his parents were displeased with the women he had married and that his father had straitly enjoined Jacob not to marry a Canaanite woman.
- Therefore, Esau went to the descendants of Ishmael (he already was dead) and took another wife of by the name of “Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife.”
- Perhaps, Esau thought he would curry greater favor of his parents in marrying a woman who had family connections as they had instructed Jacob to do.
- However, his ignoring of his parents' wishes with his previous two wives had already damaged their relationship.

Genesis 28 : 10-15 - And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. 11 And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. 12 And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. 13 And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; 14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

- Meanwhile, Jacob journeyed on toward Haran.
- At a certain place, he prepared to ‘camp out’ for the night, using stones he found for pillows.
- That night, he dreamed and saw a ladder reaching from heaven to earth with angels ascending and descending upon it.
- At the top was the Lord.
- That night, God for the first time formally confirmed the covenant he had made to Abraham with Jacob.
- Again, the land was promised to Abraham's seed, specifically, that of Jacob.
- Moreover, God promised that Jacob's seed would be as the dust of the earth and would spread from that point to the west, east, north and south. (The place he where he stood was near the center of the land God had promised Abraham.)
- As God had promised both Abraham in Genesis 22:18, and Isaac in 26:4, He likewise promised to Jacob. “In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”
- Moreover, God promised to be with Jacob and to keep (i.e., protect) him where ever he went.
- He furthermore guaranteed to bring him back once again to the land of promise.

- God concluded with a promise which is precious to any to this day doing His work.
- “For I will not leave thee, until I have done *that* which I have spoken to thee of.”
- The idea is that God would fulfill his purpose and plan for His life and would be with him therefore throughout.
- Those who are of that promised seed (in Christ) to this day may claim that promise as they do His will.

Genesis 28 : 16-19 - *And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. 17 And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. 18 And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. 19 And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first.*

- Jacob awaked out of his sleep terrified.
- Though he was of the seed of Abraham, he certainly had not to this time been a godly man nor a God-fearing man.
- He now had come face to face (albeit in a dream) with the God of his fathers.
- He was rightly frightened.
- He assumed that he had inadvertently camped out where Jehovah God dwelt.
- Therefore, he thought this place to be the house of God and the gate of heaven.
- He therefore got up in the morning, took the stones he had used for pillows, made an altar of them, poured oil upon it perhaps as an offering, and called it *Beth-el*.
- That name literally meant, ‘the house of God,’ though it had otherwise been known as *Luz* (which meant ‘Almond tree’) and may have been the name of a nearby town.

Genesis 28 : 20-22 - *And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, 21 So that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: 22 And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.*

- Jacob therefore vowed what turned out to be a weak and venal vow to God. (Recall that Jacob to this point was not re-nowned for his godliness or faith).
- He in effect sought to make a deal with God. He said, “If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God.”
- In other words, Jacob said, if Jehovah will bless me and help me, then I will make him my God.
- Moreover, he proposed that the stone altar which he had set up would be God’s house and he would tithe of his increase to Him. (It is of interest that Jacob was aware that service to God involved tithing. It was a common principle long before the law of Moses.)
- Notwithstanding his sudden attempted piety, what Jacob tried to do was make a deal with God, to wit: if God blesses me, I will worship Him and even tithe to Him. Jacob would have to learn the hard way in the years to come that that is not how one approaches God.