

A photograph of a church building with a steeple, surrounded by palm trees and a paved area. Overlaid on the image is the text "Starlight Adult SS Lesson Genesis 28" in a stylized, bold font with a red outline.

# Starlight

## Adult SS Lesson

### Genesis 28

Jacob did everything, both right and wrong, with great zeal. He deceived his own brother Esau and his father Isaac. He wrestled with an angel and worked fourteen years to marry the woman he loved. Through Jacob we learn how a strong leader can also be a servant. We also see how wrong actions will always come back to haunt us.

#### **I. The Venture (28:1-9)**

We can accurately say that the rest of Genesis presents the life of Jacob, including his trials with Laban (28-31), with Esau (32-33), and with his sons (34ff). The story of Joseph is actually a part of Jacob's history.

The real reason Rebekah engineered Jacob's departure from home was to avoid the anger of Esau (27:41-46), but her excuse was that she wanted Jacob to find a godly wife (see 24:1-9). Esau's worldly wives were causing trouble in the home, as is always the case when God's people marry outside of God's will. Rebekah actually planned to send for Jacob when the time was right (27:45), but this plan failed. Jacob never did see his mother again. Once again, "faith is living without scheming." We all need to heed the warning of James 4:13-17.

It is wonderful when a son can leave home with his father's blessing! But Jacob could not depend on his father's faith. He had to meet God and make some decisions of his own. Unfortunately, it took more than twenty years for Jacob to come to a place of real surrender, and how dearly he paid for his unbelief and rebellion! Verses 6-9 illustrate the conflict of the flesh and the Spirit: Esau (the flesh) deliberately disobeyed the Lord and brought even greater sorrow into the home.

#### **II. The Vision (28:10-12)**

Jacob traveled about seventy miles from Beersheba to Bethel, a three-day journey. That night, he took "one of the stones" to rest against as he slept, and God gave him a vision of a ladder (or staircase) from heaven to earth. John 1:43-51 is the NT explanation of this verse.

The ladder symbolizes Jesus Christ. Jacob is a perfect picture of the lost soul—in the darkness, fleeing for his life, away from the father's house, burdened with sin, and ignorant of the fact that God is near him and wants to save him. The ladder pictures Christ as the only way from earth to heaven. He opens heaven for us and brings heaven's blessings to our lives. And He alone can take us to heaven. Jacob thought he was in a lonely wilderness and awakened to discover he had been at the very gate of heaven! Relating this further to John 1:43-51, we note that Jacob was an Israelite who was full of guile (deceit), while v. 47 describes Nathanael as an Israelite without guile.

This is the first of at least seven recorded revelations from God to Jacob (31:3, 11-13; 32:1-2; 32:24-30; 35:1, 9-13; 46:1-4). The angels on the ladder were an indication of God's care. They appeared again to protect Jacob when he was about to face Esau (32:1-2).

*Notes for 28:10-15 God's covenant promise to Abraham and Isaac was offered to Jacob as well. But it was not enough to be Abraham's grandson; Jacob had to establish his own personal relationship with God. God has no grandchildren; each of us must have a personal relationship with him. It is not enough to hear wonderful stories about Christians in your family. You need to become part of the story yourself (Galatians 3:6,7).*

#### **III. The Voice (28:13-15)**

Visions apart from the Word of God can be deceiving, so God spoke to Jacob to assure him. A person is not saved by angels or visions; he is saved by faith in God's Word. Note the promises that God gave to Jacob:

*A. The land (v. 13).*

This promise was first given to Abraham (13:14ff) and was reaffirmed to Isaac (26:1-5). The Holy Land belongs to the Jews, even though they do not possess all of it. One day, Israel will "possess her possessions" (Obadiah 17).

*B. The multiplied seed (v. 14).*

This assured Jacob that God would give him a wife; otherwise he could not have descendants (see also 13:16 and 22:17). Today, there are Jews at every point of the compass.

C. *God's personal presence (v. 15).*

This verse suggests that Jacob would wander about but God promised to be with him. Why? Because God had a plan for Jacob's life, and He would see to it that His plan was fulfilled (Phil. 1:6; Rom. 8:28-29). Though in the hard years ahead Jacob had to reap the consequences of his sins, God was still with him to protect him and bless him.

**IV. The Vow (28:16-22)**

"This is the house of God!" exclaims Jacob, for the name "Bethel" means "house of God".

*Notes for 28:19 Bethel was about ten miles north of Jerusalem and 60 miles north of Beersheba, where Jacob left his family. This was where Abraham made one of his first sacrifices to God when he entered the land. At first, Bethel became an important center for worship; later, it was a center of idol worship. The prophet Hosea condemned its evil practices.*

His experience that night not only changed him, but it changed the name of the place where he slept. To commemorate the event, Jacob set up a pillar and made it into an altar, pouring out a drink offering to the Lord. Years later, when he came back to Bethel, Jacob repeated this act of consecration (35:9-15). This act of faith (even though caused by fear) was Jacob's way of dedicating himself to God. It is a wonderful thing that by faith a believer can turn a "pillow" into a "pillar"!

There are two interpretations suggested of Jacob's vow:

- (1) that he is bargaining with God by saying "If";
- (2) that he is showing faith in God.

This is actually the first vow recorded in the Bible. It is likely that both interpretations are true: Jacob believed God's Word, but there was still enough of the "old man" in him to try to bargain with God the way he bargained with Esau and Isaac.

He was so accustomed to **"scheming"** that he tried to scheme his way into God's blessing! This was finally exposed and dealt with at Jabbok (Gen. 32). Jacob did return home in peace (Gen. 35:27-29), and he practiced tithing (v. 22). He realized that his dedication to God meant nothing unless his material goods were under His control as well.

Abraham had practiced tithing (14:20), and in both cases the Law had not yet been given. Those who say that the tithe is not for this age of grace miss the fact that the early saints practiced tithing. It was their expression of faith and obedience to the Lord who guided them, guarded them, and provided for them.

*Notes for 28:20-22 Was Jacob trying to bargain with God? It is possible that he, in his ignorance of how to worship and serve God, treated God like a servant who would perform a service for a tip. More likely, Jacob was not bargaining, but pledging his future to God. He may have been saying, in effect, "Because you have blessed me, I will follow you."*

*Whether Jacob was bargaining or pledging, God blessed him. But God also had some difficult lessons for Jacob to learn.*

Jacob did not always live up to this vow in the years that followed. He "met his match" in Laban, who was a schemer himself! For twenty years the two of them tried to outsmart each other, but, in the end, Jacob had been disciplined and God had kept his promises. It is good for us believers to have a "Bethel" in our lives, a place where we meet God in a serious way and make some definite commitments to Him. If we get away from the Lord, we can always come "back to Bethel" (Gen. 35:9-15) and renew our dedication. Jacob is an illustration of the conflict between the two natures, for he was always battling the flesh and trying to depend on his own abilities and plans. How good to know that God watches over His wayward children!