

The Book of Genesis

Chapter 28

28:1 So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him and commanded him: "Do not marry a Canaanite woman. (NIV)

Isaac's Approval

Isaac now blessed Jacob with the clear knowledge it was Jacob that he blessed, thereby putting his approval on the transference of the promises.

Time Frame

Jacob was about 58 years old by this point, and had observed the conditions his parents were experiencing with Esau's wives.

28:2-9 Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. May God Almighty [TAN: "El Shaddai"] bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community [NRS: "company"] of peoples. May He give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham." Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way, and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, who was the mother of Jacob and Esau. Now Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to Paddan Aram to take a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he commanded him, "Do not marry a Canaanite woman," and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Paddan Aram. Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; so he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, in addition to the wives he already had. (NIV)

Esau's Choice

Esau took a wife from the family of their grandfather Abraham, just as Jacob went to take a wife from the family of their mother. This might have been done out of a desire to please his parents, but more likely to have greater claim to the promises of Abraham, since Jacob was only marrying into his mother's side while descendants from Mahalath would have more of Abraham's blood.

Mahalath

Mahalath's real name was probably "Basemath" [spice, fragrant, pleasing—36:3], yet was called Mahalath ["forgive"] to signify that Esau wanted forgiveness from Isaac for marrying Canaanites.

28:10-11 Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. (NIV)

Jacob's Stone

This stone has been traditionally viewed as the same one that was taken by Jeremiah to Ireland, and later had the old Coronation Chair of the kings and queens of Ireland, Scotland and England built around it.

28:12 He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. (NIV)

God's Throne

This verse gives us the indication that the place of God's residence is not millions of miles or light-years away from earth. Since He resides in a dimension which we cannot see, the area of God's throne in the third heaven can and does easily exist alongside or sharing the same space as the earth.

28:13-15 There above it stood the LORD, and He said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac [God's name is not normally linked with that of a living person]. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. 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. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." (NIV)

Promises Confirmed

Abraham also had the promises confirmed to him while he was sleeping (15:12).

Dreams

Abraham's dream focused on the sojourning of his descendants in Egypt, God's deliverance in the exodus and their return to the land of promise. Jacob's dream focused on his own person sojourning in Haran and that God would bring him back to the land of promise.

28:16-21 When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it [dedicated it to worship]. He called that place Bethel ["house of God"], though the city used to be called Luz [name when Abraham first came there—12:8]. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If 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 the LORD will be my God (NIV)

Conditions

Jacob laid down the conditions that must be met before he officially accepted Isaac's God as his own God.

28:22 and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth." (NIV)

Tithing

This is the second occurrence of tithing, the first being with Abraham (14:20). For Jacob to use the percentage he does shows that he was already aware of the law. However, since he had always lived under the authority of the patriarch, he had never been in the position to tithe. All he had was legally the patriarch's, and the patriarch assumed the responsibilities of tithing for his whole household.