

Between Heaven and Earth

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[0 : 00] I'm so glad to see you all here this morning, this Sunday, following Easter Sunday.

! It's good to have you all back with us. And we are returning this morning, though, to the book of Genesis. We've actually been out of the book of Genesis for about a month.

But prior to the last month, we've spent a lot of time walking through the lives of Abraham and Isaac. And now, the life of Jacob. We've been looking at the lives of these great men that we often refer to as the patriarchs or the fathers.

Because they are spoken of frequently throughout Scripture. And God is often referred to as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Or the Scriptures frequently speak of the covenant that God made with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

And so we recognize, along with the writers of Scripture, that these men are seminal figures in the history of God's dealings with mankind. And so as we've been walking through Genesis, we've been taking our time to try to understand not just who these men were, but how they interacted with God and what God is revealing about Himself in His Word through the lives of these patriarchs, of these great fathers of the faith.

[1 : 31] And so this morning, we are returning back to this study of the patriarchs. And we are in the middle of Genesis chapter 28, which means we're jumping in sort of in the middle of the life of Jacob.

We're going to read this morning from Genesis chapter 28, verses 10, all the way down through verse 22. And I'll fill in a little bit of the backstory in a moment. And we'll even cast our eyes ahead a little bit at what's to come in the life of Jacob to give us context.

But this morning, I want us to see one of the most important, one of the most pivotal events that occurs in the life of this particular patriarch. And so we're going to jump in in chapter 28 at verse 10 and read down through verse 22, which is the end of this chapter.

And I want to invite you to stand to your feet in honor of God's Word as we read. Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran.

And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth.

[2 : 39] And the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, your father, and the God of Isaac.

The land on which you lie, I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south.

And in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land.

For I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you. Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, Surely the Lord is in this place. And I did not know it. And he was afraid and said, How awesome is this place!

This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. So early in the morning, Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it.

[3 : 42] He called the name of that place Bethel. But the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made 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 clothing to wear, so that I come again to my Father's house in peace, then

the Lord shall be my God.

And this stone which I have set up for a pillar shall be God's house. And of all that you give me, I will give a full tenth to you. Father, help us to understand what it is you are revealing about yourself in this story.

Help us to understand what it is that you would have us to see about how we can relate to you, our Creator and our Redeemer.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. The book of Genesis really is fundamentally a book about who God is and how He relates to the people that He has made in His image.

Genesis chapter 1 opens the book of Genesis by showing us a sovereign, all-powerful God who merely speaks and things come into existence.

[4 : 59] God does not create like the stories of the false gods of the nations around them who struggle and fight amongst themselves in order to bring the world into existence. God merely speaks.

He stands alone. He speaks all things into existence. And He rules with absolute authority over His creation. And yet, He creates at the end of the seven to six days of creation, He creates man in His image.

Male and female, He creates us in His image so that we might be reflections of His goodness and His glory and His sovereign power, His rulership over the rest of creation.

He even gives us a command which includes the command to rule over the world that He has made. So God reveals Himself to us in the opening pages of Genesis as the Creator, as the sovereign ruler of the universe, and as the One who has made us uniquely and suited us uniquely to be His representatives in the world.

And as the story moves forward, we get to see some of the details in Genesis chapter 2 about how God went about making Adam and Eve the first human beings in His image.

[6 : 13] But very quickly, the story takes a tragic turn in chapter 3 when Adam and Eve disobey God, they fall and they plunge all of their descendants, the rest of humanity, into ruin.

And the rest of the book of Genesis from that point on is no longer a story simply about who God is and what He has made us to be, but it is now a story about who God is, what He has made us to be, and what He will do to restore us to what He originally intended us to be.

Even in Genesis chapter 3, the very chapter that narrates our fall into sin, there is the hope that God will someday bring forth an offspring, a seed of the woman who will set things right, who will defeat the enemy, who will defeat the serpent, Satan himself, and turn us back and restore us back to our original purpose.

He will do that, of course, through His own suffering, we are told. But He will do that. He will accomplish that. But that awaits the far future. Genesis lays out for us, and really the rest of the Old Testament lays out for us, this great expectation.

And yet as we wait for that, we see that there are mountains and valleys, there are times of great triumph in which God does great things among those whom He has chosen for Himself, and yet there are great valleys that humanity finds itself in.

[7 : 49] Because we are, like our original parents, we are bent oftentimes upon fulfilling our own desires, and about achieving things by our own strength and by our own power.

In fact, as you walk your way and you continue through the book of Genesis, you see two basic responses of fallen humanity. You see either they do what Adam and Eve did in terms of seeking to fulfill their own desires.

They saw that the fruit was good. They saw that it was good to eat. And they desired it, and so they went after it. And so you see humanity many times seeing what they want and going after it.

It results in Genesis 6-9 in the judgment of the flood. Where humanity pursues, for generation after generation, pursues its own desires and its own ends, and eventually arrives at the point to where God says, I've had enough.

I'm going to end this. And He rescues only Noah and Noah's family out of all of humanity. But even in rescuing them, He does not yet set them free from the full curse of the fall in the garden so that Noah himself remains a sinner.

[9 : 02] His children remain sinners. His grandchildren are sinners. His great-grandchildren are sinners. So that you only need to move down a few more generations, and there you see humanity

again. Yet this time, this time they are not simply pursuing their own desires.

This time they have taken up the other aspect of the fall in the garden. This time they are trying on their own to achieve a likeness to God. They are trying on their own to bridge this distance between themselves and God.

And so they begin to construct the Tower of Babel in Genesis chapter 11 in an attempt to somehow reach God and reach the heavens. It's absurd to us.

We try to picture this. We try to think of mental images of what are they doing there? What kind of tower are you going to construct that could possibly ever reach to God Himself? And yet in their hubris, they think that they can do it.

And God Himself will not have it. He will not allow it. Even if it were possible, even if humanity, even if sinful humanity could somehow, on their own, reach God, come into the presence of God, find a way to enter into His presence, what awaits them there?

[10:21] God bans Adam and Eve from the garden. He removes them from His presence, the place in which He walked daily with them. He removes them. Why? Judgment, yes, but also great mercy.

They are to remain in the presence of God as sinful fallen people in the presence of a good and holy and righteous and just God.

They would surely be destroyed. Think of Isaiah the prophet when he merely receives a vision of God's glory in the temple. He's not literally transported to the heavens.

He merely sees a vision of God in the temple. And yet, he begins to fall apart. He says, Woe is me, for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips. I live among a people of unclean lips.

And my eyes have seen the King. My eyes have seen Him and they can't handle it. Isaiah gives us a picture of what happens to sinful people when they find themselves in the presence of God.

[11:20] So God removing Adam and Eve from the garden is mercy on His part. God preventing the people from building the Tower of Babylon, trying to reach to His presence, is mercy on His part.

Judgment, yes, but mercy mingled in all the way. They are sowing the seeds of their own destruction every time they think that by their own effort they might bridge this great chasm that exists between themselves and God Himself.

It's a mercy that God extends to them. Because we cannot, as fallen, sinful, frail human beings, we cannot bridge the gap.

We cannot reach to where God is. And even if somehow we were able to, we would find ourselves buried beneath and destroyed by the holiness and wrath of God Himself.

And yet, the story does not end with those moments. The story does not end after the flood. The story does not end after the tower is toppled and the people are scattered.

[12:30] The story continues. Because God is determined to Himself bridge the gap. God is determined to Himself reach down to humanity rather than humanity reaching up.

God is determined to create a way Himself to restore fellowship and communion between Him and those made in His image.

In fact, when we read here in Genesis chapter 28 about this dream that Jacob has, I think that Moses, even as he records this event, intends for us to remember the Tower of Babel.

I think for Moses, as he writes this down, intends for us to have in our minds the image of the last time someone tried to build a stairway to heaven, tried to reach to the heavens and it ended in disaster.

Yet here's Jacob as he falls asleep seeing the image of a stairway to heaven, not constructed by his own efforts, not built by himself, but he simply sees it as a great act of mercy on God's part.

[13:41] But we're not quite there yet. We need to look and remember what's happening here. We need to know what's leading up to this particular event. We need to be reminded of who Jacob himself is.

Jacob is not someone who is more righteous than everyone else. Jacob is not someone who by his own behavior, by his own good deeds, can somehow now stand in the presence of God.

No, that's not who Jacob is. Jacob is a deceitful man. Jacob is a man who has connived. Jacob is a man who has tricked his own family and torn his own family apart by his ambitions, by his desires to take that which God had already promised to him, but to take it by his own cunning.

That's who Jacob is. Jacob stole his brother Esau's birthright, showing no mercy, showing no pity to Esau as Esau came, thirsty and hungry, and yet taking advantage of the moment so that he might take the birthright from him.

He then later tricks his own father so that he might steal the blessing from Esau, his brother, the blessing that his father was saving and hoping to give to Esau. Tricks his own father.

[14:58] And Jacob is where he is, having left Beersheba on his way to Haran because he is suffering from the consequences of his own sinful behavior.

After having tricked his father, received the blessing that Esau so desperately wanted, Esau has vowed the next time he sees Jacob, he will kill him.

He has had enough of this brother. He has had enough of him throughout their lives. He's ready to kill him. And so his mother and father send him away.

Flee. Run away from this place. In fact, go. Go back to the place where our ancestors live, where our relatives live, where our ancestors came from.

Go back. Go back to where Abraham, our father, came from. Go back. Find a place there. Hide. Run away from the wrath of your brother Esau.

[15:59] A wrath, by the way, that Jacob himself has provoked. A wrath that Jacob, we might say, deserves to receive. And so here he finds himself fleeing away from the land that has been promised to Abraham and to Isaac and going back to the home of Abraham.

Going back to the city of Haran. He has been living in Beersheba, down in the southernmost portion of the lands that were promised to Abraham and to Isaac. The distance from Beersheba to Haran, depending upon which path you take and exactly where scholars don't always agree on exactly where the city of Haran would be located.

But depending upon those things, it's somewhere between 450 and 550 miles away. And we pick up with him only about 50 to 60 miles into his journey.

In other words, he's got a long road ahead of him. Unlike Abraham's servant who was sent years before to go to Haran, he goes by himself. A man alone, a man having to live with the consequences of his own terrible decisions.

Just a couple of days, just a few days into his journey, he finds himself, we are told at the beginning of the chapter, at a certain place.

[17:24] We don't even know where. Notice the language. Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. Long journey. And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night because the sun had set.

He's not living in comfort and ease. He's just doing what's necessary to survive. We find out later towards the end of the chapter, in fact, that this place is actually a fairly well-known, large Canaanite city known as the city of Luz.

It's an important city in Jacob's time. But Moses emphasizes that this place is not important because the Canaanites dwelled there.

This place is not important because it was once the seat of a very large, powerful city. No. This place will be made significant. It will be made important by what God does here in the life of Jacob. So it's only a certain place where he arrived when the sun had set and he lays down to go to sleep. And then he has a dream. And what's interesting about the way that this dream is narrated for us is the way that it begins.

[18:37] Three times at the beginning of the telling of the story of the dream, we see the word behold. Take a look there in verse 12. And he dreamed and behold. And then again in the middle of verse 12.

And behold the angels of God. And then again in verse 13. And behold the Lord stood above it. These three behold statements are ways of causing us to slow down as we read through the passage.

They're there to cause us to stop. So far in the first couple of verses of the story we have smooth regular narrative. The verbs are normal verbs that would just carry you through a story. And now all of a sudden these commands behold look stop think about what I'm about to say.

So that's what we need to do. We need to stop. We need to pause and think about the things that are described. What exactly is it that Jacob sees in this dream? And why are these things so significant?

So the first thing that we're told that he sees is this ladder. Behold there was a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven. Now in all likelihood we should probably translate this word that's rendered ladder as a stairway.

[19 : 48] It probably is some sort of stairway whether it's a part of a larger structure or not we don't know. There are a lot of suggestions and it's really hard to say when you're talking about a person's dream because it doesn't actually have to correspond to anything in reality.

But we see what we should probably picture in our minds here is some form of a stairway. Not simply a ladder like we would picture but stairs probably broad and wide stairs.

In other words this is some sort of structure that is linking heaven and earth. That's the point. The top of it reached into heaven or into the skies.

It goes from the earth from the ground all the way in into heaven. This is the bridge. This is what humanity has been seeking after.

This is what we still seek after today. Every religion in the world is designed to build a bridge between heaven and earth. earth. That's what they exist for to make some sort of pathway, some way so that we can be restored to what we once were.

[20 : 55] Now religions envision that in different ways. They have various misunderstandings of what we once were and what we were intended to be and what God is like. But nevertheless there is this sense of understanding and knowing that we are not what we are supposed to be.

And so religions exist to try to build a bridge to what we ought to be. Christianity is in fact unique. And that Christianity represents a world view in which we do not try to construct our own stairway into heaven.

But one is shown to us. God reaches down to us and he himself comes down to us taking the form of a servant. I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit now, right?

We need to look at the second and behold. Now we are told behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. This is another reason why we probably should not picture merely a ladder but probably a fairly wide stairway because what Jacob actually sees is angels going up and down.

Now when we think about angels in the context of Genesis we should think of them as exactly what the word itself means. They are primarily messengers throughout the book of Genesis. They do other things, they have other functions but they are primarily messengers.

[22 : 16] We think of the angels that God sent down to Sodom and Gomorrah to deliver the message to Lot. Hey, you need to leave this place now. They are messengers.

They bring the word of God down to man. And so you have a stairway linking heaven and earth and you have the means by which God has chosen to communicate his word from heaven to earth.

So things are ratcheting up. There is a connection first of all. Now there is actually movement between heaven and earth. But the third behold really really takes the cake.

Verse 13, Behold the Lord stood above it and said. It is remarkable because the angels are ascending and descending and they are the messengers of God.

And you think it couldn't get better than that. I mean God's sending his message to us through an angel. And it does get better because now suddenly we see the Lord himself and he himself begins to speak.

[23 : 21] Now it's unclear if we should translate this as the Lord stood above it as if he's pictured in Jacob's dream as being above the stairway or if it should be translated something along the lines of the Lord stood beside him as if the Lord is right there beside Jacob.

But in whichever way your translation renders it, I don't think it makes a big difference at all because the main point of this vision and of this dream is that God himself makes a way for him to speak to and be present among his chosen people.

Jacob is among those whom God has chosen for himself before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad. God said. God chose Jacob for himself.

And now God takes the initiative. God does all that is necessary to reach down into the life of Jacob and be present with Jacob himself.

The significance of this dream is in showing us and reminding us that though we will fail in all of our attempts to reach to God. Whether that is by trying to perform a certain list of good deeds, whether that's by religious rituals and ceremonies in which you try to make yourself acceptable to God, or if in the parlance of today's language you simply say, I try to be a good person, I try to live a good life,

all of those things will fail as attempts to connect you to God himself.

[24 : 55] They will fail as ways to bridge the gap that exists between you and your maker. They will not work. And yet God in his mercy and grace is showing us here that he will build the bridge.

That he will come down and he will make himself known to his people. He will do the work, not us. And in fact, as we turn to the New Testament to look for a better understanding, a clearer picture of what God is communicating here, we find that there is only one clear reference in the New Testament back to this particular passage.

It's found in the Gospel of John and it's actually Jesus who is speaking and he refers back to this event and the stairway that Jacob sees. I want you to hold your place there and I want you to turn to John chapter 1 because I think that this is probably the most significant thing that we can glean from this morning's passage.

In the Gospel of John chapter 1, John is relating how Jesus initially called his disciples to follow him. He calls Philip to follow after him and then Philip says, I need to take you to this to this to someone else.

[26 : 15] I need to take you to Nathaniel so that he might follow you. And so Jesus goes to Nathaniel and. And he reveals himself to Nathaniel. Nathaniel is amazed.

He's amazed that Jesus can know this information about him without ever having met him. He says, truly, you are the son of God. You are the king.

He recognizes Jesus for who he is. And Jesus doesn't reply by saying, good, good. I'm glad that you've seen who I am. That's not what Jesus says. Verse 51, Jesus tells him he will see something better than that.

And he says, truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened in the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man.

In other words, Jesus's point is, I am the stairway. I am the bridge between heaven and earth. I am the means by which God bridges the gap created by the fall of humanity into sin.

[27 : 24] I am the stairway from heaven down to earth. He is the way. This is why when Jesus indicates that he is the way, he follows that up by not merely saying I'm the way, the truth, and the life.

He follows it up by saying no one comes to the Father except through me. Because we have made every other attempt throughout our history to come to God in some other way.

And Jesus says, stop. I am the only means by which you will ever gain access to my Father. I am the only way to the Father.

I am the stairway that Jacob sees in his dream. You want to know how it is possible for God high, lofty and exalted and holy and just and righteous, how it is possible that he might descend and make a way for us to come into his presence without destroying us.

Without a repeat of the flood when God came down to see what man was doing. You know, it's possible for that to happen without us being undone like Isaiah. It's possible because of Jesus.

[28 : 54] It's possible because Jesus comes like us as one of us. And he bears in his body the punishment that we deserve.

And he takes the curse upon himself so that we might. So that we might be able. To walk upon the stairway so that we might be able to have God stand above us and beside us and rather than be destroyed by him, enter into fellowship and communion with him.

This dream that Jacob sees. It's not just a pause in the midst of his journey. It's not just a significant event in the life of this particular patriarch.

This is Jesus himself making known to us how it is that he himself will bridge the gap.

How it is that he himself will go about restoring us to communion and fellowship with God. But take a look back in Genesis and I want you to see what God says to Jacob.

[30 : 09] It comes in three basic parts. First, he gives him the land promise again. He reiterates the promise that he gave to Abraham and to Isaac. He says, I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, your father, and the God of Isaac.

The land on which you lie, I will give to you and to your offspring. So the land promise given to Abraham and to Isaac is now passed on to Jacob.

But there's more. Part two. Your offspring, or literally your seed, shall be like the dust of the earth and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south.

And in you and in your offspring, your seed, shall all the families of the earth be blessed. So the promise, not only of numerous descendants given to Abraham and Isaac, but the promise that the offspring, that the seed who was promised back in Genesis chapter 3, that very promise itself now passes through Jacob.

The sinner, the deceiver, the trickster, this great promise of a redeemer passes through Jacob himself. And then number three, behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

[31 : 29] What could be more significant than that? What could be more life-changing for Jacob or for anyone else for God to say, I'm going to be with you. I'm going to be beside you.

I'm going to walk with you. And I will not leave you. I will not forsake you. I will not depart from you until I have fulfilled all of my promises to you.

A staggering promise. Especially in the context of Jacob's world and Jacob's life. Jacob lives in a world where when he moves from one region to the other, he moves from the domain, at least in the understanding of the people of the day, he moves from the domain of one God to the domain of another God.

That's how they saw things. The Canaanites had their gods and their gods ruled over the land of Canaan. The Egyptians had their gods and their gods ruled over the land of Egypt. The Assyrians had their gods.

The Babylonians had their gods. All these ancient cultures had their gods. And they were tribal deities. They ruled over their areas and their people. And those were the limits.

[32 : 37] On the occasion when those gods would somehow be able to rule over another area, they viewed it as their gods working through them to defeat other gods and take over.

It was always a struggle. That's how they saw things. But we already know. We read the beginning of the story.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. He is not a tribal deity. He has no limits. He has no boundaries. All the gods of the nations are figments in the imaginations of the people. And He rules over them all. He rules supremely and sovereignly. And He says to Jacob, I've promised this land to you.

To your fathers. And you're leaving this land. And here's what I need you to know, Jacob. Wherever you go, I will be with you. And I guarantee that I will fulfill my promises to you.

[33 : 42] You go to Haran, I will be with you. Why? Because God has no boundaries. He has no limits. It doesn't matter where Jacob goes. It doesn't matter where we go.

What is it that David says in the Psalms? If I ascend into the heavens, you are there. If I go to the depths of Sheol, there you are. Our God has no boundaries and no limits and no limitations.

And when He determines to do something, when He decides, this is my promise, I will fulfill this promise, nothing can deter him and nothing can stop him.

Jacob may be running away from home and he may be running away from his brother and he may be seemingly running away even from those things that have been promised to him. But because God says, I will be with you and I will go with you wherever you go, the promises of God will with certainly be fulfilled for Jacob and for his descendants after him.

And no matter what journeys God takes us on, no matter which ways He directs our paths, no matter what surprising turns of events happen in our lives, no matter what tragedies befall us, what illnesses may come, what events happen in our lives that make us think, this is not how it was supposed to be, this is not where I'm supposed to be, this is not who I'm supposed to be with, no matter what we might think in all of those circumstances, God is not limited by those circumstances.

[35 : 18] God is not surprised that you find yourself in a particular place or around a particular people, nor is God's willingness or determination or ability to fulfill His promises toward you impacted in any way by those things that have caught you off guard and have put you in a place that you would have never chosen.

Wherever Jacob goes, God is with you. Wherever we go, if we belong to Him, wherever we go, He is with us and He cannot fail to fulfill His great promises to us.

Now Jacob's response is not what we would call a textbook response. It's not entirely bad, but it's not the best response to this great promise that God has given him.

Things start off good. It looks decent initially. We're told in verse 16 that when he awoke from his sleep, he said, Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it. Well, there you go.

Now you know. That's good. You're recognizing things. It says that he was afraid. He ought to be afraid. And he says, How awesome is this place? Literally, how terrifying, how fearful is this place? [36 : 40] This is none other than the house of God. And he recognizes this is the gate of heaven. God has shown me here that He has made a way.

Verse 18, So early in the morning, Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head. He set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name of that place Bethel. Bethel literally means house of God.

But the name of the city was Luz at first. This is, I think, the point at which Jacob begins to slip a little bit. Because Abraham's reaction and Isaac's reaction in these moments where God has made Himself known to them, their reaction is always to build an altar.

Their reaction is always to build a place of worship. Jacob merely says, I'm going to build a pillar here. He builds a little pillar, turning up the rock, pours some oil over it.

It's not a sinful reaction to God's revelation of Himself. But it's, neither is it the best reaction to God's revelation of Himself.

[37 : 54] And then Jacob makes a vow. Verse 20, Jacob made 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 clothing to wear so that I come again to my Father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God.

Now there's nothing wrong with making a vow in Scripture. Sometimes we think that vows are always wrong and always bad. After all, Jesus says, let your yes be yes and your no be no. What's the point of a vow?

But vows are not viewed negatively throughout the Scriptures. Not in the Old Testament and not in the New Testament. There are a number of people in the Old Testament who take certain kinds of vows upon themselves.

And even as we move to the New Testament, we see, for instance, the Apostle Paul who takes a vow at one point in time upon himself. So vows are not necessarily a negative thing.

It's not bad that Jacob takes a vow. Where I think Jacob slips is in saying, if God does these things, then He will be my God.

[39 : 05] You see, the normal thing of a vow would be, Lord, I'm going to take these obligations upon myself. This is what I am going to do so that you might give me additional blessings.

Jacob, though, says, if you do happen to do the things you just told me you would do, not, then I will rejoice in you, then you will be my God.

Because, you see, thus far in the story of Jacob's life, Yahweh is not his God. It's not his God. It's a strange thing to realize that this great father of the faith could make it this far in life.

It could be the grandson of Abraham and the son of Isaac. It could be the one chosen by God. And yet, thus far, at this point in his life, Yahweh is not his God.

Did you notice even how God identified himself to Jacob? Look back up in verse 13. Listen to what God says. I am Yahweh, the Lord.

[40 : 21] When it's in all capital letters, Lord like that, it's the name Yahweh. I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham, your father, and the God of Isaac. And stop right there.

Now, if you are a person familiar with the Hebrew Bible, with the Old Testament, then that should sound a little odd to you. Because throughout the Old Testament, God is identified as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

The covenant is viewed and identified as the covenant that God made with Abraham, and with Isaac, and with Jacob. That's just routine. In fact, when you get to the next book in the Bible, to the book of Exodus, that's how God identifies himself with Moses.

That's how he reveals himself to Moses. In Exodus chapter 3, verse 6, this is the incident of the burning bush. God says, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

See, that's who God is. And yet, here we are in Genesis chapter 28 when God reveals himself to Jacob himself and he says, I'm the God of Abraham. I am the God of Isaac.

[41 : 37] Stop. He's not yet Jacob's God. And what Jacob says here is, if you will do what you have said you will do, then, then you will be my God.

Jacob continues even now to fall short. Jacob continues even now to fail to understand what it is that God is telling him.

God is telling him, I'm going to be with you. I'm going to protect you. I'm going to fulfill all of my promises toward you. And Jacob's response is, okay, do that and then you can be my God. So what results? Well, we're going to see unfold over the next few weeks. We're going to get three full chapters of trouble for Jacob.

Three full chapters of the ups and downs and deep valleys in the life of Jacob. Jacob the trickster will arrive in Haran and he will immediately be fooled and tricked by his uncle Laban.

[42 : 43] The only way that he's able to gain any wealth initially is to try his tricks again which he does. But eventually even that comes back on him. He tries to run away and he is caught.

No, his life which will take up many, many years in the land of Haran, his life in Haran will be difficult. His life in Haran will have all of the mistakes that he has made and all the sins that he has committed against others thrown upon him and put back in his face.

Why? Because God is doing a work and God is not yet the God of Jacob in these chapters. But God is determined.

He has said, I will be with you. He has said, I will bless you. I will give you the offspring through your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed.

He has said these things and he will do these things. And God is so merciful in the life of Jacob that even though Jacob responds by saying, sure, if you do all that you can be my God.

[43 : 56] God does not abandon him. God does not rain down fire upon him. God in his mercy disciplines him. God in his mercy brings hardship into Jacob's life so that eventually Jacob comes to the point where he finds himself in chapter 32.

Once again, in the middle of the night, but now on the way back to the land of promise from Haran. Once again, by himself.

He finds himself wrestling with God. Because God won't let him go. He won't let him go his own way. He won't do it.

He has chosen him. He has given him great promises. He will be the God of Jacob. But it will come through much pain for Jacob.

It will come through much suffering for Jacob. But when God says, I am with you and I will not let go of you, that's precisely what he means.

[45 : 04] one of the things I read some years ago and I've never been able to find the quote again in the books that I have on my shelf.

I need to go buy more books clearly. But I read from Jonathan Edwards and I'm going to have to paraphrase the quote because I couldn't find it again this week.

One of the things though that I read from Jonathan Edwards was a statement as he was reflecting back upon the great awakening of his time, some of the good things about it, some of the bad things about it.

One of the things that he said was that he was always amazed at how much like a Christian, non-Christians could appear to be for a time.

That how you could appear to see the fruit of the work of God in the lives of those who do not actually know Him because they are so adept at looking like a Christian. But then he said on the other side of that equation he was also constantly amazed at how sometimes God's people did not look like God's people.

[46 : 13] And that while it is true that God will always bring about the fruit in the lives of His people, that those who believe, those who are justified by faith in Christ will most certainly be sanctified and made holy by Him, that the fruit of the Spirit will be worked in the lives of them.

Nevertheless, Edwards says as he has observed, he has noticed that the road to the growth of those fruit can sometimes be a road in which sometimes God's people just don't look quite like God's people at times.

I think even for those of us who have already called upon the name of Christ and He is our God, we go through valleys at times.

For God comes along and He begins to discipline us. He begins to drive us and turn us back to Him. And the way you tell the difference between one for whom God is now God and one for whom He is not, one whom God has a hand on and He won't let go of, and one who's going their own way, is how they respond in that time of discipline.

what will you do when God comes to discipline you? What will you do when God comes and He bears upon you with His fatherly hand of discipline?

[47 : 38] How will you respond? Jacob resists and resists and resists until finally, finally, God comes to Him in the night and throws Him to the ground, wrestles Him down.

And I think one of the lessons that we learn, not simply from this passage alone, but from the bird's eye view of the life of Jacob, is God has given us great promises.

He will never, ever fail to fulfill those promises toward His people. But when His people resist, and when they turn away that He has not authorized, He will not let them go.

He will come in with a harsh hand of discipline at time. And He will, whatever it takes, He will wrestle us to the ground.

And He will bring us to our senses. Or it may be that you are in the place that Jacob is right here in chapter 28.

[48 : 47] You have heard the promises, you are aware of the promises, you know what they are, you know who God is, you've heard all about Him, you get that, but He is not really your God.

He's not. You have not submitted to Him. You have not had your name and identity changed by Him. to Him. The call of the Scriptures is clear.

Repent and believe and you will be saved. Do not think that because God is the God of your fathers, that He is automatically your God.

Do not think because you know a great deal about the promises of God that they belong to you.

Because until you have fallen to the ground with Him and yielded to Him, they are not yet yours.

And the call of the Gospel goes out. The call of the Gospel simply says repent and believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

[50 : 07] Amen.