

“Jacob’s Ladder Dream: Accepting God’s Promise
of Hedging His Bets?”

(Genesis 28:10-22)

The Back Story:

1. Rebekah’s Continuing Scheming:

- a. She learned that Esau planned on killing Jacob as soon as Isaac, her husband and the siblings’ father, died (Gen. 27:41-42).
- b. She therefore wanted Jacob to go to her brother Laban’s house in Paddan-Aram until Esau cooled down (Gen. 27:43-45).
- c. She used her alleged dislike of Esau’s Hittite wives as a pretext for getting Isaac to send Jacob to Paddan-Aram (Gen. 27:46) to procure a wife from the family (Gen. 27:46).

2. Isaac Takes the Bait and Sends Jacob Away:

- a. He summoned, blessed, and commanded Jacob; primarily, Jacob was to go to Rebekah’s father Bethuel’s house and get a wife from one of his uncle Laban’s daughters (Gen. 28:1-2).
- b. Isaac’s blessing explicitly includes the blessing of Abraham, which involves land and progeny (Gen. 28:3-4).
- c. Jacob obeyed his father (Gen. 28:5).

3. Esau’s Reaction:

- a. Esau noticed not only his father’s displeasure about his wives but also Jacob’s obedience as he set out for Paddan-Aram to procure a non-Canaanite wife (Gen. 32:6-7).
- b. Seeing that Jacob would marry within the family, he decided to take a third wife from his paternal side—he married Mahalath, Ishmael’s daughter and Abraham’s granddaughter (Gen. 32:8-9).

Jacob’s Actual Journey (summarized in v5—detailed in vv10ff.):

1. Jacob heads for his grandfather’s and uncle’s house (Gen. 28:10).

2. Jacob stops for the night (Gen. 28:11).

3. The Dream Sequence (Gen. 28:12-15):

- a. Preparing to sleep, Jacob uses a stone for a pillow (v11).
- b. His dream featured a ladder/staircase (sullām; סלם) reaching skyward. Also angels were going up and down on the ladder/staircase (v12). [Note: Contrary to Western art, biblical angels do not have wings].
- c. The importance of *place* is emphasized. In v11 the word (māqôm; מקום) is mentioned three times.
- d. YHWH (=the distinctive name of the Israelite deity) stood above the ladder/staircase,

and spoke (v13ff.).

- (a) YHWH's Introduction: "I am YHWH, the God of Abraham, your father/ancestor, and Isaac."
- (b) "The land on which you are lying down I will give to you and your progeny."
 - (1) "As a consequence, your progeny will be like the dust of the earth."
 - (2) "Also, you will spread out in the four cardinal directions."
 - (3) "And, in you and your progeny all the families of the good earth will be blessed."
- (c) "Look, I will be with you, and protect you, guard you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land."
- (d) "Indeed, I will not forsake you until I have accomplished what I promised you."

4. Jacob Wakes (Gen 28:16ff.):

- a. Upon waking, Jacob declares, "YHWH was in this place, and I did not realize it."
- b. Now afraid, Jacob declares, "How awesome is this place; this is nothing else except the House of God and this is the gate of heaven."
- c. Also, upon waking up, Jacob took the stone he used as a pillow, made it a sacred marker, and anointed it with oil."
- d. Subsequently, Jacob named this place Bethel (=House of God) [formerly named Luz].

5. Jacob's Vow (Gen 28:20ff.):

- a. "If (!) God will be with me, guard me where I am going, give me food and clothing, and I return in peace to my father's house . . . "
- b. "Then YHWH will be my God and I will give a tenth of what You given me to You."