

A Stairway from Heaven

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] But we're going to turn to our Bibles now. We're back in the book of Genesis and we're reading this morning in Genesis chapter 28. If you don't have a Bible, if you need one, there's plenty just outside the door there.

Somebody will be glad to give you one and then you'll be able to follow along as we read together. Genesis chapter 28 and we're going to read the second half of the chapter beginning at chapter 28 verse 10 and reading through to the end of chapter 28.

Last time we were looking at the long story in chapter 27. A sad story in many ways of the varying misdemeanors of all the family of Isaac.

But nevertheless, God's extraordinary purpose marching on. And that's what we see also in this passage today. So we're going to read Genesis 28 beginning at verse 10.

Jacob left Beersheba and went towards Haram. And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night because the sun had set.

[1 : 07] 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 or a staircase set up literally towards the earth.

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.

Or perhaps beside him. 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 I will bring you back to this land.

[2 : 19] And I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. And 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. 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 top of it. And he called the name of that place Beth-el.

Which means house of God. The name of the city was Lutz 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.

[3 : 21] Shall be God's house. And of all that you give me. I will give a full tenth. To you. Amen.

May God bless to us. His word. Would you turn with me if you would. To Genesis chapter 28. And the passage we read together from verse 10.

What we've seen. I think clearly in these chapters. Linking the story of Abraham. With what follows. With Isaac. And then Jacob.

Is the amazing. And even shocking tenacity. Of God's covenant grace. Despite the sin of. Every one of the characters we saw.

In chapter 27. For example. God's covenant purpose. Marches on. And does so with strength. It is amazing. His grace.

[4 : 18] And yet God's amazing grace. Is not. Cheap grace. God's grace. Always. Demands response. His tenacious grace.

Is also. Always. A transforming grace. And the call of grace. Is a call to discipleship. To live under God's rule. Under his command.

That's what Moses. Who wrote Genesis. Was constantly. Teaching his people. To love the Lord.

Their God. With all their heart. And soul. And strength. And that meant. Therefore.

Having his words. On their hearts. Ruling their lives. Lord Jesus. Says the same thing. Doesn't he?

Make. Disciples. Of all nations. Teaching them.

To obey. Everything. I've commanded you. God's grace. Always. Demands response. And the Bible's insistent.

[5 : 12] That we remember. That. Especially. When we think about. God's sovereign. Electing grace. Moses reminds Israel. Doesn't he? That they were God's.

Chosen people. Yes. But not. Not because of their. Righteousness. They were a stubborn. People. The Lord had to discipline. Them through many. Conflicts.

Many testings. He had to humble them. In order. To teach them. To be faithful to him. And in fact.

Moses here in. In Genesis. Is reminding his people. That that was so.

For Jacob himself. The father of the nation. He himself. Was disciplined. By God. He himself. Spent years. Outside the land of promise. In a place.

Where he also. Was transformed. As one scholar. Puts it. Transformed. From the ambitious. Jacob. Who prevails. Through his physical strength. And malevolent cunning. Into an ambitious.

[6 : 05] Israel. Who prevails. Through prayer. To God. And the Israelites. And every true Israelite. Has to follow. In that same.

Train. And these chapters. From Genesis 28. Verse 10. Right through Genesis 32. They're the heart. Of the. The cycle. Of the stories. About Jacob. And they tell us.

About the great transformation. Through great trial. And through great struggle. Through some. 20 years. Or so. Of his life. Life. And actually. The shape.

Of the story itself. Tells us. About a life. That literally. Is hedged in. By God's. Transforming grace. His scandalous grace. Because the whole story.

Is actually bracketed. In the same way. It begins. And it ends. With an encounter. With God. And God's angels. Here. In Bethel. And then.

[6 : 59] In chapter 32. At Peniel. And in between. What we have. Is a story. Of God's. Transforming grace. At work. And Moses wrote.

To teach that. To his people. The Holy Spirit. Preserved it. In the scriptures. For us. So that we also. Might be encouraged. That we might find hope. In the God. Who disciplines.

All his true children. And he does so. In order. That we might share. In his holiness. That we might see. His face. And the encouragement.

And the hope. Comes from not. Refusing. But rather. Receiving. The word. Of God. When he speaks to us. As he does today. From heaven.

Just as Jacob did. When he was personally. Confronted here. With. Well. The stairway from heaven. Which he discovers. Is the only gateway.

[7 : 53] To heaven. That is open. Here on this earth. And that's what this story. That we have before us. This morning. Is all about. Falls actually. Into two parts. Verses.

10 to 15. Give us God's revelation. To Jacob. And then you can see. From verse 16 to 22. We have Jacob's response. And the response. That he makes. Corresponds exactly.

To the three. Definite emphases. Of the revelation. God's place. Of revelation. God's presence. In the vision. And then God's promise.

To Jacob. Jacob. So let's look at. Verses 10 to 15 first. Which shows us. A personal revelation. A personal revelation. Of God. To Jacob. And notice.

The first thing. That we're. Told about. Is the place. The place where it happened. That's the key word. Isn't it? Verses 10 and 11. He came to a certain place. He took one of the stones. Of that place.

[8 : 48] He lay down. In that place. And the thing about this place. Is. Well. For Jacob. It was a very dark place.

Wasn't it? We're told. It was night. Verse 11. The sun had set. So it was dark. But you see. That physical darkness. Echoes. A far greater darkness.

In Jacob's experience. At this time. Because the opening words. Speak of isolation. Don't they? Jacob left. Beersheba. Jacob was very much.

The homeboy. Remember. Staying among the tents. And here. Now he's left. His home. His family. His place. For the very first time. And he's gone off. On a very uncertain journey. To seek a wife. But this is very different. Isn't it? From that journey. In chapter 24. Where Isaac's servant. Set off with a. A great train of camels. And all sorts of servants. And so on. In order to find a wife.

[9 : 42] For Isaac. Impression here. Is very different. Isn't it? Jacob is very much. On his own. And he's fleeing. Isn't he? From the. The murderous rage. Of his brother. And ahead of him.

Though he doesn't yet know it. Lies years. And years. Of exploitation. And misery. Under Laban. Bruce Wolke. Says he's situated.

Between a death camp. And a hard labor camp. And that's the truth. He's alone. It's dark. And he's in a very barren place. It's a windswept rocky moor.

Way up in the hill country. North of Jerusalem. Think about. Think about the Larigrew. In the middle of the Cairngorms. If you've ever been there. Walking through the middle. Of the boulder fields. It's a pretty.

Desolate place. Especially in a storm. And Jacob here. Doesn't have a tent. He's sleeping out. Rough. Remember there's wolves. There's jackals. There's lions. And he takes.

[10 : 39] Verse 11. A big stone. Well it wouldn't be. A very comfortable pillow. Would it? I suspect it was more. To protect his head. From one of these wild animals. I don't suspect.

He got to sleep very quickly. I don't think I would have. But I wonder. What he was thinking about. When he lay down. In the dark. By that big stone. He must have felt. Very lonely. Fearful. Must have been quite weary.

And stressed. Maybe he was tormented. By a sense of guilt. About everything that had happened. Maybe now he was. Full of doubts. About his own.

Place. His own identity. Fearing for his own security. Jacob was. In a very dark place here. Both physically. And I think. Emotionally. And I suspect.

It was made all the darker. Because. He knew. Didn't he? That it was all his own doing. That's a very hard place. To be. Isn't it? When we find ourselves. In a bed of our own making.

[11 : 37] Place of. Estrangement. Maybe. Ruptured relationships. Within a family. Like with Jacob. Perhaps with a brother. Or a sister. Or parents. Or child. Or a spouse.

Maybe. That's a place of real agony. Isn't it? And it's all the more. Tortured. If you know. That your situation. Of misery. Is all actually.

Your own fault. Because of what you've done. Jacob. Jacob deserved. To be in a dark place. Didn't he? And that's. You see. What made it darker still.

Maybe unbearably dark. And yet. Into that very dark place. Came something else. That Jacob. Didn't deserve. Verses 12.

And 13. Tell us. That it's in this dark place. That he finds. A divine presence. We're told at last. He did sleep. And he dreamed. Verse 12.

[12 : 30] And look. Behold. There was a ladder. Or a staircase. Literally set up. Towards. The earth. With its top. Reaching into heaven. And that dream.

Of Jacob's ladder. Has made the phrase. Part of our language. Hasn't it? I suspect. Probably. It was part of the inspiration. For what some people would call. One of the greatest rock. Songs of all time. A stairway to heaven. By Led Zeppelin. I can remember. Many many years ago. When I was a youngster. Learning to play that on my guitar. You remember the refrain. She's buying. A stairway. To heaven.

Well you see. A stairway. Or a staircase. Probably is the better. Translation here. Because if you look. You see the image. Is probably something like. Those ziggurats. In ancient Babylon. Remember the Tower of Babel.

Back in Genesis chapter 11. That was. To be a stairway. Up to heaven. Wasn't it? So people could reach up to heaven. And find their own significance. Their own identity. Get a name for ourselves.

[13 : 28] So that we won't be scattered. So that we will become. Our own rulers. And actually that. Building a stairway to heaven. Is what encapsulates.

All human religion. And aspiration. It's all about. Buying a stairway to heaven. Finding the way to security. Finding the way to significance. In life. Whether it's through. Piety and religion.

Or whether it's. Through seeking prosperity. Or glamour. Or fame. Or whatever else it might be. The world is full of people. Isn't it? Trying to buy. A stairway to heaven. Trying to reach up.

And knock, knock, knock. On heaven's door. Another rock song. Isn't it interesting. How many rock songs. And ballads. Actually express. That longing. That searching. Well that's exactly. What Jacob had been doing. He'd been seeking. To grasp. What he thought. Would give him. The blessing. Of a stairway to heaven. In a sense.

[14:24] He had the right instinct. In a sense. He was. Seeking. God's blessing. Just as. As many. Many people in our world. Have that instinct. They're seeking. For something more. Than this world.

Can afford. They instinctively know. There's something more. And they're looking for it. The divine. But Jacob you see. Had been seeking that. As many people. By reaching up.

With his own strength. His own cunning. His own control. His own manipulation. That's what we saw. In the last chapter. But here we are now. In his darkest hour.

He's at his most. Impotent. And what does he see? He at last. Sees reality. Three times. We're called. To look. Behold. Verse 12.

Behold. Look. A stairway. Set up. Towards the earth. That is. It's set up. From heaven. Coming down. To earth. A stairway.

[15:20] From heaven. That bridges. The gap. To earth. From the top down. That's the picture. And secondly. Behold. Look. What's going on. It's all. Heavenly activity.

On it. Isn't it? Not earthly activity. It's the angels of God. Who are ascending. And descending on it. In other words. God. God. Is bringing all his plans. For heaven.

And earth. To fruition. Through his own actions. Through his own heavenly agents. His angels. He doesn't need Jacob. Arranging things for him.

And then verse 13. Thirdly. Behold. Look. The Lord himself. Is right in the midst. Of all of his activity. He is in sovereign charge. Of every single detail.

The divine presence. From heaven. Come down to earth. Through a stairway. Built from heaven. To come knocking on Jacob's door. You see.

[16:17] It's a divine revelation. Isn't it? That shows us. The absolute reverse. Of all. Human religion. It's not man. Searching for God. It's God. Coming down.

And searching for this man. And finding him. In his sovereign power. God himself. Has chosen. When. And where. And how. To open heaven.

And lay a stairway. For himself. To come down. To earth. To meet Jacob. Not the other way around. Couldn't be more striking. Could it? But just in case.

It would be possible. To misunderstand the vision. We're told. And Jacob is told. Very clearly. Because God actually. Speaks. And explains it all. Look at the second half. Of verse 13.

Through to verse 15. You see. In this dark place. Is a divine presence. And he articulates. A definite. And yet. At the same time. A rather disturbing. Promise. It's a definite promise.

[17:14] Isn't that so clear? In verse 13. I am the Lord. The God of Abraham. Your father. And the God of Isaac. And he deliberately. Repeats to Jacob. Now. Not just. The blessing.

That Isaac had given him. Back in chapter 27. But he puts it explicitly. In the terms. Of the covenant promise. First given to Abraham. And given to him. On many occasions. In fact. The words here. Almost exactly. Echo the words to Abraham. In Genesis chapter 13. And verse 14. Which incidentally. Also took place. At Bethel. He reiterates.

That fourfold promise. Of the land. Do you see? A place. Of inheritance. And of offspring. Progeny. Like the dust. Of the earth. And of God's plan.

For salvation. To bless all the families. Of the earth. Through his seed. And then what's so striking. Is the repetition. Of the promise. Of God's presence. And his protection. Personally.

[18:10] Personally. For Jacob. Three times. You see verse 15. I will be with you. And I will keep you. Wherever you go. To bring you back. To this land. And I will never leave you.

Until I've done everything. That I've promised you. Jacob was the first person. In the whole Bible story. By the way. To hear those wonderful words. I will be with you.

The Emmanuel promise. God with us. But Moses. The writer. He knew its significance. Do you remember? When he shrank back.

Later on. Didn't want to go to Pharaoh. With all these messages. That God gave him. And God says to him. But I will be with you. And he kept saying that.

Again and again. To the Israelites. Remember. In fact. Moses said. After the golden calf. In fact. If you. If you won't go with us. We can't go anywhere. But God did go with them. And he promised to remain with them.

[19 : 05] In fact. Even after Moses. I will be with you. He said to Joshua. Do you remember? And I will keep you. Verse 15. Again. Moses. He doesn't. You know those words.

Very very well. From the priesthood blessing. The Aaronic blessing. The Lord bless you. And keep you. And all faithful Israelites.

In fact. Even. To this day. We still sing the words of Psalm 121. Don't we? The Lord will keep you. From all evil. The Lord will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out.

And your coming in. From this time forth. And forevermore. Jesus said. I will never leave you. Or forsake you. Until I've done all.

That I've promised you. What a wonderful assurance. Don't you think. To the Israelites. All those centuries later. Under Moses. As they're being brought back. Into that very land of promise.

[19 : 58] After the exodus. After the wanderings. In the wilderness. And they hear God's words. To Joshua. As he says. As I was with Moses. So I will be with you.

I will never leave you. Nor forsake you. What a wonderful encouragement. To again read these words. First spoken to Jacob. Their patriarch. And for them to be able to say.

Well. It's true. Isn't it? God didn't leave him. Didn't forsake him. He did accomplish everything. That he promised them. And our very existence here. As the people of Israel today.

Is proof of that. So surely. What God says to us. Will also be true. And in the same way. It's just a wonderful encouragement. To believers like us today.

Isn't it? Especially when we. Ourselves. Feel very keenly. Often. What it means to be. Outside the camp. In this world. What it means to bear. The reproach. Of Christ.

[20 : 53] As Hebrews 13. Puts it. In fact. In that very chapter. The apostle says. Be content. Because he has said. I will never leave you. Or forsake you.

There's something wonderful. Isn't there? In that. Definite promise. Of God's. Committed presence. Committed protection. To a man like Jacob. It's given so freely.

Isn't it? So gratuitously. Despite everything. Despite all his. Defects. All his misdemeanors. And in fact. It's given. Isn't it? Without. Waiting for any evident.

Change of heart. Or behavior in Jacob. But you see. That is exactly. What makes this. Definite promise. Also. In some ways.

A very disturbing. Promise. Because naturally. We think. Why? Don't we? We think. Well. What has Jacob done. To deserve that kind of. Undertaking from God. He's a deceiver.

[21 : 50] He's a twister. He's broken up. His own family. And his. Darkness. His. His downfall. Everything he's experiencing. Now. It's entirely. His own fault.

It's well deserved. What on earth. Is God doing? As William still says. He pours his grace. Into the heart. Of the prodigal. With seemingly. Indecent. Extravagance.

The tabloids. Would be screaming. Wouldn't they? This is a scandal. He doesn't deserve this. No doubt. That would have been. Esau's reaction. His brother. No doubt.

That's what the average person. In the street. Would say. Because. We're very good. Aren't we? At spotting what people. Don't deserve. He doesn't deserve. Any of this. Jacob. Certainly. Doesn't deserve.

Any of this. Kind of favor. It's a scandal. But you see. It's not just. A pagan mind. The non-Christian mind. That thinks that way. Is it?

[22 : 46] That's why Jesus. Remember. Told a story. Didn't he? About two brothers. About a prodigal. Younger brother. And a very dutiful. Elder brother. And he told it.

To make that point. Absolutely. To very pious. Very religious. Pharisees. Because you see. God's grace. Is actually. Very disturbing. It's deeply disturbing. To every human heart.

It's offensive. It's scandalous. And it enrages. The human heart. It's one of the things. That's so powerful. Isn't it? In.

In Victor Hugo's story. Les Miserables. Most of us haven't read the book. But most of us probably have seen the musical. Remember Javert. The policeman. He is the embodiment of justice.

Isn't it? He is the arm of the law. And he is baffled. He's enraged. In the end. He's actually undone. Commits suicide. Because he cannot.

[23 : 41] Get hold of the grace. And the mercy. That is embodied. In a man. Like Jean Valjean. A former prisoner. Who himself. Has been transformed.

By grace. And mercy. And forgiveness. God's grace. Is deeply disturbing. It's very offensive. To mankind. Why is that?

Well. It's because. When God shows grace. To others. It undermines. My sense of self-worth. Doesn't it? Because my sense of self-worth.

Comes. From comparing myself. To others. Like the older brother. In Jesus story. We want to feel better. Than him. Don't we? That's what gives us.

A sense of worth. A sense of significance. Better than him. Not as bad as her. And if. He or her. Who don't deserve things. Has shown.

[24 : 37] Enormous favor from God. Well that's enraging. Isn't it? But you see. Even when God shows us. Grace and favor. That we don't deserve. We find that very difficult too.

Because. That humbles us. We can't bear that. Because we want. To deserve. What we get. We want the blessings. In our life. To come our way.

We want people to say. Well look at him. He's done so well. He's made it all himself. He's a self-made man. See deep down. I want God.

To say that to me. I want to knock on heaven's door. And say. It's me. Let me in. You've been waiting for me. I deserve to come in.

Don't I? But you see. Jesus said to everyone. Who thinks that way. Doesn't he? Especially. To very religious people. To moral people. To church people.

[25 : 32] He said. Until you understand. That it doesn't work. That way with God. That it never works. That way with God. You'll never understand grace.

And you'll never understand. God. Or his heart at all. And that's what Moses. Is teaching his people. Here you see. Here is an undeserving.

Renegade. If ever there was one. He's in the pits. Of his life. But in that dark place. He finds. The divine presence. And this truly wonderful.

Definitive. Promise. And we might find it disturbing. We might even find it offensive. But that is. The personal revelation. From God.

That Jacob received. Well. How did Jacob respond? Well. Look at verses 16 to 22. They show us his personal response. A deeply personal response.

[26 : 32] To God's personal revelation. And again. We have three sections. And they. They correspond. To the place. To the presence. And to the promise. Of God's grace.

And in the Hebrew text. There's lots of word plays. That just make that. Even more obvious. But first. There's his response. Concerning the place. Look at verses 16 and 17. What was a dark place. Now. He sees. Is in fact. A divine place. Surely the Lord. Is in this place. And I didn't know it. Now he can see. What he couldn't see before. But in fact.

It always been true. All he could see. Was a place of tribulation. Wasn't it? But in fact. This was the place. Of transformation. It was the beginning.

Of a whole new meaning. To Jacob's life. The place of. Insignificance. And great insecurity. In fact. Was none other. Verse 17.

[27 : 25] Than the gate. Of heaven. The house of God. Bethel. Not Babel. Man's self-built route. To the divine. That leads only to confusion.

To catastrophe. Remember. Not Babel. But Bethel. The very gate of heaven. Opened by God himself. And offering fellowship.

Within his own. Dwelling place. Notice. There's nothing trite. There's nothing flippant. Is there. About Jacob's reaction. Because. When somebody encounters God.

For real. It can never be like that. Look at verse 17. Jacob was afraid. He had a right sense of fear. Because. He'd been in a place. That was an awful place. But now. It's become a truly.

Awesome place. He's conscious. Of the presence. Of the true. And living God. God. And when that happens.

[28 : 18] It is truly. Awesome. And fearful. Do you remember. How Isaac. Trembled greatly. When God. Revealed himself. To him. Through his mistake. In verse. In chapter 27. And Jacob.

Rightly. Trembled. The fear of the Lord. Is the very beginning. Of wisdom. Do you remember. That is no accident. Is it. That in times. In church history. When there's been. Great awakenings.

And real movings. Of the spirit of God. The result. Has never been. Joking. And laughter. It's always been. A great sense of awe. A great sense of the fear of God.

It was an awesome realization. But it was a wonderful one. Because Jacob sees. Heaven. Opened. He has a personal sense. On his own heart.

Of the reality of God. He'd known about God. All of his life. Hadn't he. And it's his family's God. But now. Suddenly. The Lord was very real to him. Deeply. And personally. Think about.

[29 : 16] John Wesley. You know the story. How he. Had known of God. He thought he knew God. But it became real. All of a sudden. As he sat in that chapel. In Aldersgate. In London. And he says. His heart. Was strangely warmed. He knew. That this God. Was truly his God. It's a story of many young folk. Isn't it? They grew up in a Christian home. And in the Christian church. But there comes a time. When they know. That the Lord is real. That he's my God. As well as my father's God. And that's Jacob here. Becomes a divine place for him. And then. Look at verses 18 and 19. Because he responds. To the divine presence. Do you see. With divine proclamation. That's the significance. Of this pillar. That he sets up. Just as the stairway. In verse 12. Was set up. This is a public witness. To determine. Proclamation. Of the way. That God.

[30 : 12] Has made. To earth. By which heaven. Can be reached. It's God's way. To God's house. And Jacob. Acknowledges that.

By anointing this pillar. With oil. He's proclaiming. God's anointed way. Which has invaded. This lost pagan world. To bring hope. To bring. Wonderful salvation. Into a place of darkness. And confusion. Nearby. Canaanite. Luz. Was a very large city. Apparently. But. Like Babel. You see. All. It's merely. Earthly wisdom. Was utterly useless. Compared with. This great revelation. From heaven. To Jacob. Showing God's house. And God's way. To his throne. It's very hard. Often for us. To believe that. Isn't it? Because. The gospel. That we proclaim. Just seems. Such a feeble thing.

[31 : 07] Just a few words. Tiny little pillar. Up against the massive. Monuments. Of human civilization. Human culture. Progress. Learning.

All that's around us. In our. Modern world. That was the same. For Paul the apostle. Wasn't it? You read of him. Going through. Ancient Greece. Ephesus. Corinth. Athens. One tiny little man. With a little book in his hand. And a word to proclaim. Amidst these monuments. And temples. And magnificence. But that word. Which Paul tells us. Was devoid. Of wisdom and power. In the world's eyes. That word. God chose. To bring to nothing. Things that are. And to demonstrate. His power. And wisdom. To bring eternal life. And salvation. To countless thousands. To unveil. The very gate of heaven.

[32 : 05] To call people. Up. Into the kingdom of God. And likewise. You see. Jacob's little pillar. Proclaimed. The presence. Of the power. Of a living God.

Who has come. Down to earth. From heaven. Who is God. And Lord of all. As the carol says. God. But third. And perhaps. Most important. Of all. Jacob makes. A decisive. Personal response. Doesn't he. To God's promise. In response. To God's. Definite promise. Of grace. Jacob makes. A decisive. Pledge. Of faith. Verse 20. Jacob. Made a vow. Sometimes people. Think here. That Jacob. Is trying to bargain. With God. That's quite. To misunderstand. That the form. Of what he's saying. Is a form of a vow. And it's a real. Confession of trust. He's saying. If this. If this promise. Really is true. And I believe. It is true. Then the Lord. This God.

[32 : 59] Will be. My God. My God. Also. This is a great. Yielding to God. It. It totally. Reorients. The whole of Jacob's life.

It's a decisive. Pledge. Of allegiance. Calling God. To. To keep his promise. To do. As he said. In verse 15. To be with him. To keep him. To bring him again. To the land. And that's what the Bible means. By faith. Isn't it? Taking God. At his word. And trusting him. And pledging yourself. To him. And notice carefully. What this real faith. Looks like. First of all. Verse 21. It is personal. It's a personal submission. Isn't it? To the lordship. Of this God. The Lord will be. My God. That is. I will be his servant. I'll be obedient. To his voice. I'll live under his direction. And his call. Faith is personal. Always like that. If it's real. And secondly. Verse 22. It's public.

[33 : 55] This stone. Shall be God's house. See. Real faith. Is never private. Jacob is making immediate. Public witness. To the true God of heaven. People say sometimes.

You know. Oh. Faith is a private matter. Nonsense. Real faith. Can never be private. It's very nature. It's to publicly witness. To the truth of God. In a pagan world. That's why in the New Testament. Public. Association. With the church of Christ. Coming into the church. Through baptism. Out of paganism. Is what marks your transition. From the world. Into God's world. There's no such thing. As private Christianity. That's fake Christianity. It's personal. It's public. And notice thirdly. It's also palpable. Or if you like. Practical. Jacob acknowledges. That everything he has. Is God's. And he gives gladly. A tithe. A tenth of everything. To God. [34 : 54] As a token. That everything that he has. Belongs to God. It's a tangible thing he does. Not just a theory. But a reality. What that's saying.

Of course. Is that real Christian faith. As well as being public. It has a palpable impact. On your pocket. True Christian generosity. And true Christian grace. Are two sides of the same coin. They always go together. And where faith is real. Because God's grace. Has become personally real. In your life. There will always be. A joyful. Generous response. To God. To his people. And to the work of his kingdom. Real. Personal surrender. To the lordship of God. In Christ. Real public witness. To the world. Of that God. And real palpable service. And glad. Generous. Giving to God. In tangible ways. In costly ways. That's. What faith looks like. Always.

[35 : 47] According to the bible. Well you might be saying. Well why does any of this matter? Why is it relevant? Why is. Why is this. Story about Jacob's personal life.

In the bible. At all. Well it was very relevant. Wasn't it. To the Israelites. Later on. In Moses day. Because. They were called by God. Just like Jacob. They were chosen. For a purpose. But they also needed. To respond. Personally. To God. He appeared to them. Do you remember? Also. In a very similar way. At Sinai. Visible power. With words of great promise. Promised to be with them. In fact. He pitched his tent. With them. And went with them. Wherever they went. He promised to keep them. And in just the same way. God. Called his people. To respond. Just as Jacob did. To make a personal. And public. And tangible. Bowing down. Of their lives. To him. To trust him. To cleave to him. Your God.

[36 : 45] Is the God of Jacob. Is what Moses said. To his people. The God who's present. The God who. Promises you a future. And you're to make him. Your God. You must keep faith. With him. Just as he has promised.

To keep faith with you. So it was very relevant. And that's why Moses. Wrote these things. For the Israelites. But why should this ancient story. Matter to you and me today?

Well it matters to you and me. Indeed it matters to every single person. In the world today. Because. This very same revelation. That God gave to Jacob. He has now given.

Just as personally. And far more clearly. And far more completely. To all the world. In the good news. Of the gospel. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. And he's commanded.

His church. Hasn't he? To preach this message. To every nation. What Jacob saw. You see. In his vision. Was a glimpse. Wasn't it? It was a foretaste. A preview. Of what God's promise.

[37 : 41] To Abraham. Was all about. And would ultimately accomplish. That the gate of heaven. Would be opened. And the way back. To paradise. Restored forever. Remember.

At the end of Genesis chapter 3. The gate to Eden. Was firmly shut. Wasn't it? Angels with flaming swords. Barring the way. To the life. In the home of God.

But Jacob saw this vision. And he had a glorious picture. A glimpse. Of that promise. Of the gate. Once again. Being opened forever. He glimpsed. He glimpsed. What John the apostle saw.

What we quoted. At the beginning of the service. I looked and behold. A door. Standing open. In heaven. Opened. At last. Forever.

By the seed of Abraham. By the lamb of God. By the. The root. Of David. The Lord Jesus Christ. And that's what Jacob saw here. He. He saw it. He glimpsed it.

[38 : 37] Gloriously. From afar. And Jesus himself. Actually makes that very plain. Doesn't he? At the beginning of John's gospel. Do you remember? Philip finds Nathanael. And he says to him. We find the one. That Moses in the law.

And all the prophets spoke about. His name is Jesus. And they went to see Jesus. And when they came. Jesus said to Nathanael. Yes. And you will all. See. Heaven opened.

And the angels. Ascending and descending. On. On the son of man. You see what he's saying?
What became real for Jacob.

Will become real for all. Who will receive personally. The same revelation of grace. That Jacob
received. But now. Now fulfilled. In the person of the Lord Jesus. He.

Is. The stairway. To heaven. Because he. And only he. Came down from heaven. To earth. To
open that gate to heaven. He's the stairway.

[39 : 35] From heaven. Come. To reunite. Heaven and earth. From the top down. That's what
Jesus is saying. And that's what his. Coming to this earth. To die for our sins.

Is all about. And that's why. The gospels tell us. That when he died on the cross. The curtain of the
temple. In Jerusalem. Was torn from. Top. To bottom. Him. Because the way into heaven.

The way into God's presence. That was previously barred. To all sinful human beings. Was now
opened forever. By Jesus. Atoning death. He is the priest.

From heaven. Come down. The stairway. Because he only. Could unlock. The gate of heaven. And
let us in. As the hymn says. But he did.

And so. Even. For a deceiver. Like Jacob. Even for broken. Men and women. Even for the fugitive.
For the feeble. For the feckless.

[40 : 31] For every outcast. For every lonely searcher. There is. A way back. To God. From the
dark paths of sin. There's a door. That is open.

And all may go in. At Calvary's cross. Is where you begin. When you come. As a sinner to Jesus.
God. William still has some lovely words.

On these verses. In his Bible notes. He's speaking about. How at the end. Of the pilgrim's progress.
That wonderful story. John Bunyan tells us. That there is.

A slippery path. Which runs to hell. From the very gate of heaven. Remember that in the story. But
then he goes on. And says. But. There is also.

A gate to heaven. Situated at the very. Threshold of despair. And that's the gospel. That Jacob
heard that day. And that's the gospel.

[41 : 28] That our Lord Jesus Christ. Made real for all. There is. A gate to heaven. Situated at the
very. Threshold of despair. And it will go on. Being open.

And being a ready. Walkway for all. Who will give their lives. To that great Savior. Jesus Christ.
However. Often you stumble. However feeble. Your step may be. His angels.

Are on that path. Surrounding you. And his. Unquenchable promise. Hedges you in. Behold. I am
with you. And will keep you.

And will not leave you. Till I've done. What I've promised. To you. Jesus. Jesus. Is saying the same
thing. When he says. Behold.

I am with you. Even. To the end of the age. It's still the promise. Of our wonderful God. And the
risen Lord Jesus. So does this matter to us.

[42 : 23] This word about a. A stairway from heaven to earth. It matters all right. Matters to me.
More than anything else. And everything else.

In the whole world. God. But does it matter to you. I wonder if you've said. Like Jacob said here.
This God will be my God.

If you haven't. Would you promise. That and grasp hold. Of that promise today. Make it personal.
And public. And palpable.

Make a. A decisive pledge. To give yourself to him. Through the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone. Is the
gateway to heaven. But the door is open.

And he says. Come. Come up here. I am the door. Said Jesus. Whoever enters by me. Will be
saved.

[43 : 23] And I'll be with you. Always. This is the gospel. This is the gospel. Of our Lord Jesus
Christ. Let's pray. How awesome is this place.

This is none other. Than the house of God. This is the gate. Of heaven. How we thank you. How we
thank you Lord. That that gate. Is open.

And it's situated. Even at the very threshold. Of despair. Because. Our Lord Jesus Christ. At the
cost of his own blood. Shed on the cross.

For sinners. He has opened. The kingdom of heaven. To all. Who believe. So give us faith Lord.
Give us faith.

We pray. And make us your own. Now. And forever. For the sake of your. Great. And glorious name. Amen.