

Genesis 28:10 to 17

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit  
Amen.

This evening I'm preaching on Genesis chapter 28 the story of Jacob's dream at Bethel.

It was at the beginning of Genesis chapters 12 that God said to Abraham, "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."

And it was in chapter 13 verse 16 that God promised Abraham that he would make his offspring as numerous as the dust of the earth.

Later on God encountered Abraham's son Isaac, Jacob's father, at Beersheba, and in chapter 26 verses 23 and 24 God passed on Abraham's blessing to Isaac when at verse 23 God tells Isaac, "I am the God of your father Abraham; do not be afraid, for I am with you and will bless you and make your offspring numerous for my servant Abraham's sake."

And now at verse 13 of our reading this evening we heard how in Jacob's dream that the Lord stood beside Jacob 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; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth."

So, the promise given to Abraham had been passed down to his son Isaac, which has now been passed down to his grandson Jacob, who we know had 12 sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel.

So this passage from Genesis often referred to as 'Jacob's ladder' or 'Jacob's dream' is not a standalone story, but a continuation of the story of God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky or grains of sand along the seashore, Genesis 24 verse 17.

Going back to our reading, it starts, "Jacob left Beersheba and went towards Haran." Now if Jacob went towards Haran, he would have to pass very close to Paddan-aram.

Now at the beginning of chapter 28 Isaac blesses Jacob and tells him that he must go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel, his mother's father and take his wife from one of the daughters of Laban.

Now Paddan-aram is roughly 400 miles north east of Beersheba so Jacob had several days of travelling to do before he got there; and we are told that he got to a certain place on his journey, which could well have been the first day of his journey, and the reason I say that will become clear later on, and when the sun set he decided to rest there for the night.

Now whenever I go anywhere to stay the night in a hotel or similar place, I always take my own pillows with me, I can't stand pillows filled with foam which are universally used by hotels. So how Jacob managed to sleep with his head on a stone I just can't imagine. However, Jacob managed to dream so there's no doubt that he did manage to sleep.

And he dreamed that there was a ladder, or stairway, set up on earth that reached to heaven; and that the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

Now when angels meet human beings it's normally to give a message or a warning, but here they're were merely ascending and descending, which suggests that they were demonstrating that there is a connection between heaven and earth.

Today we heard from our gospel reading these words, "And he said to him, 'very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'" And in John 14:6, Jesus said to Thomas, "I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." From these two quotes, we can see that Jesus is now our connection between heaven and earth, which of course is why we pray to God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And the writer of Genesis continues, "And the Lord stood beside him, and it was then that God passed on the promise, which he had initially given to Abraham, which he then passed on to Isaac and which he now passed on to Jacob, which I've already spoken about.

It was also here that God used the phrase, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac" and if we now add Jacob to the list we not only have the three Patriarchs but we also have the identification of our God, because we often refer to God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In verse 14 God tells Jacob that his descendants will spread to the north, east, south, and west and that all families on earth shall be blessed in him and in his offspring.

We are indeed blessed because of what God said to Abraham in chapter 12 verse 3 where God said, "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." We are blessed through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because we bless Abraham.

Verse 15 reads, "Know that 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."

Verse 15 must have been very reassuring to Jacob when God said those words to him, because he must have been very apprehensive; after all when Isaac told Jacob to go 400 miles to Paddan-aram, which was in Mesopotamia, to find a wife from Laban's family, he not only had a long journey ahead of him, but he had no guarantee that he would find a wife who he could love when he got there.

That is also why I suggested that this was the first night of his long journey, because God would have wanted to reassure Jacob straight away that he would always be with him, in which case he would be travelling about 45 miles a day, presumably on horseback.

And we need to be clear that 400 miles in a country where there was no law and order as we know it, where there were wild animals, such a lions roaming about, where he had to have a stone as his pillow; that this was no stroll in the park; and knowing that God was with him keeping him safe and telling him that he wouldn't leave him must have been a great comfort to him.

And of course all our lives are the same, we have no idea what lies ahead for any of us, we may not have to put our lives at risk like Jacob had too, but nevertheless there are countless numbers of people even today whose journeys are very treacherous, but knowing that God is with all of us throughout our individual journeys of life is a great comfort.

Now of course at the time that God said those words of comfort to Jacob, Jacob had no idea what his future would be, however in the event we know that although Rachel and Jacob fell in love and that he wanted to marry Rachel, he was tricked into marrying Leah first, but a week later he also married Rachel.

And it took 14 years for Jacob to serve Laban before Jacob Rachel and Leah could return to Jacob's home in Beersheba, so there must have been times when he questioned whether he would ever get back to his family in Beersheba despite his faith in God who had reassured him all those years ago.

Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it! And he was afraid."

That may be a problem we all have, we are going about our business doing good things and quite often bad things, and then we suddenly realise that God is in this place seeing all that we do, and suddenly like Jacob we are frightened, because it is frightening when we realise that God sees all that we do, both the good and the bad.

But we have an advocate in heaven who will intercede for us when we stand before God, Jesus Christ who died, so that through faith in him, we may be forgiven, and enter eternal life with Christ in heaven.

So as Jacob was reassured and put at ease about the future, I trust that now we know that God is also with all of us as we negotiate the corona virus and other obstacles in this life, that we too will be reassured, and move forward with confidence.

As we sit let us pray

O heavenly Father, in whom we live and move and have our being, we humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit that in all the cares and occupations of our daily life we may never forget you, but remember we are walking in your sight; for your names sake.

Amen