

2—I didn't realise!

SERIES Resting in God's Promises: Jacob's journey

KEY TEXT—GENESIS 27:41-31:55

FEELING ABANDONED BY GOD

Have you ever done something wrong and concluded that because you had messed up, God must have abandoned you, or at the very least, decided to keep His distance?

It can be extremely lonely, even frightening.

BACKGROUND

God is about to appear to Jacob in a dream, but let's consider the events that have just unfolded:

- Jacob grew up with the knowledge that God had foretold he would become a great nation and his older brother would serve him. But under the direction of his mother, Jacob decided to try and manipulate events to obtain God's blessing by deception. He would endeavour to receive the blessing from his father by masquerading as his brother as he put skins on his arms to appear hairy like Esau (Genesis 27:1-40).
- After Jacob receives the blessing by deception, Jacob discovers that his brother Esau is waiting for their father to die so he could kill him (Genesis 27:41).
- Jacob's mother Rachel hears about the plot and tells Jacob to flee, but before he goes, he gets another blessing from his father (Genesis 28:1-4).

While Jacob receives the same blessing from his father Isaac, as God promised his grandfather Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3), Jacob is forced to escape, alone, in fear of his life, from his own home, because of his own deceit.

THE DREAM—GOD'S PROMISES AFFIRMED

Alone and fearful, Jacob went to sleep. He then has a dream described in Genesis 28:12-15.

God's 6 promises

1. **Land** "I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying" (13)
2. **Global family** "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" (14a)
3. **Global blessing** "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring" (14b)
4. **God's presence** "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go" (15a)

5. **Return home** "and I will bring you back to this land" (15b)

6. **Promises certain** "I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." (15c)

DISCOVERING GOD IN THE DARK

Jacob woke up astonished

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." (Genesis 28:16)

In the Ancient Near East, if someone wanted to persuade their god to reveal his will to them, they would go and sleep in the area around the temple. It was hoped that as they slept, the gods would give them a dream. What is happening in this story is the opposite. God reveals His will to Jacob, but Jacob was not looking for it because he feels alienated from God. So when Jacob wakes, he is stunned that God has appeared to him—compared to Abraham and Isaac who were not surprised at God's self-revelation.

It is not the contents of the dream that Jacob is astonished by, so much as that God had appeared to him at all.

Why was Jacob surprised?

Part of the reason appears to be that Jacob had concluded that he had been abandoned by God because he had

- Lied to his father
- Deceived his brother
- Tried to manipulate God's blessings through his own conniving.

What would you have thought?

Imagine you are Jacob in this situation. What would you be thinking? Perhaps something like,

- I have acted dreadfully. I have sinned wilfully, both against God and my family.
- Why should God fulfil His promises to me knowing the type of person I am?
- God is right to have abandoned me.
- My behaviour and weaknesses have surely disqualified myself from God's promises.

And Satan would be close by to drive these doubts deeper into your despairing heart.

i didn't realise!

But now, Jacob wakes up to realise that God was with him in this dark, unknown place. He wakes to realise that God was still going to accomplish His promises through him. In the middle of his anguish, Jacob didn't realise God was with him! Jacob didn't realise that God's purposes for him were still on track.

Application

Your past behaviour that may have revealed a corrupt heart and unfaithfulness towards God, will not disqualify you from God's promises if you are open to listening to God.

JACOB'S RE-COMMITMENT

God's graciousness to a deceiving, fearful, fugitive, prompted an immediate response (Genesis 28:18-22). Jacob would:

- **practice exclusive loyalty and worship of the one true God** v21
- **make a public witness to the presence of God on earth** by setting up a pillar v22a
- **demonstrate financial commitment to the generosity of God** through a tithe of "all that you give me" v22b

Jacob's re-commitment brings Jacob back to the centre of God's will.

HOLDING ON TO PROMISES UNDER PRESSURE

Mounting pressures

God affirmed His promises to Jacob, and Jacob has responded in commitment. Jacob's dream has been an incredible mountain-top experience. However, God often grants memorable encounters if He knows we are about to be plunged into a very dark valley where we will be tempted to doubt everything—especially God's promises and goodness. Consider the dark valley into which Jacob now walks:

- **After 7 years of hard work as a shepherd for the girl he loved, Jacob is deceived by his uncle on his wedding day** by switching Leah for Rachel—which mirrored Jacob's own deception when he switched himself for Esau (Genesis 29:16-25).
- **Conned into increased servitude for Laban another 7 years for free for Rachel** when he had been promised that his brother would serve him (Genesis 29:26-28)
- **Constantly cheated financially by his uncle Laban** (Genesis 31:6-7)
- **Robbed by his uncle Laban of the dowry paid for Rachel and Leah** which by tradition should have been given back to them at the wedding (Genesis 31:14-15). The dowry was intended to prove the hardworking nature of the proposed groom, and was not supposed to be a money making venture by the bride's parents.

Unexpected blessings in the middle of a mess

Jacob was not the only one to receive blessings in spite of the mess. Leah, the wife Jacob did not choose, was blessed with more children than Jacob's three other wives combined (Genesis 29:31-35). Though she felt abandoned by her husband, God gave her Levi through whom the priesthood would come, and Judah, through whom the kings would come—including Jesus Himself.

MY RESPONSE

1. Do I need to stop right now to realise that in spite of my failings, God is still with me?
2. Do I need to pause in the middle of my pressures and take time to remember the vision God gave me in the past—of His presence and promises?
3. Like Jacob, is it time for me to make a tangible response to God's promise of His presence, demonstrating 1) renewed loyalty to God, 2) a public testimony to presence of God, 3) financial commitment to the generosity of God?

1

LIFE POINT

God doesn't abandon me when I make mistakes

2

LIFE POINT

Mountain-top experiences are to guard me from doubt

3

LIFE POINT

My re-commitment brings me back to the centre of God's will

4

LIFE POINT

Life's greatest pressures cannot derail God's promises for me