

God's Promise
Dreaming of the Promise
July 23, 2023

Overarching Theme: 2023 – Living the Dream

Instructions: When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point: 2023 can be a year of living the dream of faithful discipleship as we take a next step forward in following Jesus Christ.

Reflect on this Scripture: **Genesis 28:10-19a**

¹⁰ Jacob left Beer-sheba and went towards Haran. ¹¹He came to a certain place and stayed there for the 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. ¹²And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³And the LORD stood 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; ¹⁴and 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 all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. ¹⁵Know 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.' ¹⁶Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!' ¹⁷And 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.' ¹⁸So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he 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. ¹⁹He called that place Bethel . . .

Commentary:

This text stands as one of the pillars of the Jacob story. God transmits to him the ancestral promises, fulfilling the expressed wish of his father (28:3-4). This is the first time Jacob appears by himself; hence it represents a new beginning for the larger story. Jacob flees from the hatred and threats of his brother, seeming to reap the consequence of his own duplicity, and the future does not seem bright. At precisely this deeply vulnerable moment in his life, God appears, not in judgment, but to confirm him as the one chosen to carry on the promise.

This story begins as Jacob is mid-route on his travels from Beersheba to Haran, from which the Abrahamic family migrated and where he will find a home and two wives. While still within Canaan, he spends the night out in the open, using an ordinary, if large, stone to support and protect his head.

A remarkable dream fills Jacob's night. He dreams that a ladder (better – a stairway or ramp) extends from earth to heaven. Ascending and descending divine beings are a part of Jacob's dream, but they have no specific function. In fact, their presence makes a negative point. While

such beings may serve as messengers, here they do *not* serve as intermediaries for divine revelation. Rather, Yahweh stands beside Jacob and speaks directly to him. The angels do not speak; God does. Jacob hears the divine promises directly from God, who in turn promises God's very own presence rather than that of a surrogate.

God's word to Jacob moves directly from self-identification to promise and constitutes *God's* confirmation of Jacob's gaining of birthright and blessing. The promises are: land, many descendants, dispersion of posterity throughout the land (not the world), the extension of blessing to others through him, presence, keeping, homecoming and not leaving. All the promises spoken in the narrative to this point are gathered up and focused on Jacob. The last four (vs 15) relate directly to Jacob's status as a traveler, extending the promise given to his father in comparable circumstances (26:3, 24).

Upon awakening, Jacob realizes the import of his dream, and he proceeds to *interpret* its significance. He recognizes that he has some new knowledge; he has moved from not knowing to knowing that God has been present with him. He also expresses awe that in this ordinary place he has been confronted by the God of whom his father spoke, indeed granted direct access to God's promise-speaking.

- Adapted from The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol I, pp. 540-42

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. Put yourself in Jacob's shoes for a moment – sent away from home to find a wife and on the run from your brother's anger. You don't know when, if ever, you will be able to return home. What thoughts fill your mind as you travel? What thoughts fill your mind as you make sure you are a safe distance away as you prepare for the night?
2. Have you ever had a dream that was so intense that you felt it was real? Have you ever experienced God in your dreams? Have you ever changed some aspect of your life in response to your dreams?
3. As you feel comfortable, share with others in your group about your dreams – what was said, what was done. If you made a change, what changed? Why or why not?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. As you consider God's promises, ponder and pray on this scripture this week:
¹⁵Know 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. (Genesis 28:15)