

Explore the Bible: March 24

A Stairway • Genesis 28:10-22

By Laura Lee Leathers



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Perhaps you have climbed the Willis Tower in Chicago, the Eiffel Tower, the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, or Big Ben. Did you make it to the top? Why does this place hold a special significance for you – the experience?

Isaac's son, Jacob, will have an encounter with God that will radically change his life. It is a place of noteworthiness because he experienced God's presence at the stairway.

Stairway is the keyword for today's lesson. It comes from the verb meaning "to lift up." Other versions will use a "ladder" (KJV; ESV). Unlike the Tower of Babel, this stairway displays "God's gracious revelation of Himself" (Lifeway).

Dreaming (Gen. 28:10-12) – Esau hated Jacob for taking the first-born blessing. He makes a threat to kill him. Rebekah learns this news and instructs Jacob to flee to her brother, Laban, in Haran. She goes to Isaac with the plan (Gen. 27:33-46).

Isaac calls and blesses Jacob before he gives the instructions to go to Bethuel and take a wife from his mother's family. Jacob willingly agrees; after all, his life is at stake.

Jacob leaves Beersheba. After traveling approximately fifty miles, he comes to a certain place, Luz (vv. 11[3],16,17,19). He finds a smooth stone for a pillow and prepares for a good night's rest.

He dreamed there was a stairway from the ground reaching to the sky. On the stairway were God's angels. "The eternal God reached down and connected with a vulnerable fugitive running for his life" (Lifeway). They were there to do God's commands.

Promised (Gen. 28:13-15) – Remember when Jacob referred to God as Isaac's God (27:20)? In the dream, the LORD stands beside

Jacob. Jacob saw and heard Him confirm the Abrahamic Covenant. There are three elements: land, seed, and blessing.

The title: "The LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac," is only used here in Scripture.

The LORD promises His presence to Jacob. Wherever Jacob went, whatever he was involved with, God's provision and protection would be with him.

As Christ-followers, we have the same promise (Psalm 139:12-17; Hebrews 13:5). God is faithful to His promises.

Gate of Heaven (Gen. 28:16-17) – Jacob realizes he is on holy ground because of the Lord's presence. He makes the following declaration: "What an awesome place this is! This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven." The house of God is God's sanctuary.

But he is also afraid. Throughout the Old Testament, when men encountered God, they also experienced fear – a holy awe (see Gen. 3:10; Ex. 3:6; 20:18-19; Judg. 13:22).

The Vow (Gen. 28:18-22) – It's time for a commitment, a response from Jacob. He picks up the stone pillow and sets it up as a marker. This is a personal spiritual mile-marker.

Next, he pours oil over the stone, an act of worship. Olive oil was a valued commodity used for cooking and medicine. "Pouring oil over the pillar indicated Jacob's devotion to God and set this location apart as a place to worship Him" (Lifeway).

Then he names the place Bethel (first mention of the location Luz). Two Hebrew words make this name: *Beth* (meaning "house") and *El* (a name for God.)

The making of a "vow" is a serious undertaking. The word in Hebrew is *nadar*, and it carries the weight of making a consecrated promise. Jacob's vow showed his complete

dependence on God.

Jacob added food and clothing and the request to return safely to his father's family. The requests went beyond what God mentioned earlier. The son of Isaac knew that his life was in danger when he returned home. Out of God's grace came His promises to the schemer.

In the final verse, out of gratitude, Jacob vows to give God a tenth of all He has given him. It is a precursor to what we know as a tithe.

In verse twenty, Jacob addresses God as "he," but in the final verse, he addresses Him as "you." Things have changed in Jacob's heart. Later, he will return and build an altar (35:1-15).

"Pray and ask God to continue transforming your life" (Lifeway) (see Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Leathers is a member of First Church, Lexington.