

Jacob Encounters God

Lesson Scope: [Genesis 28 to 35](#)

References in brackets refer to Genesis chapters 28 to 35 unless otherwise noted

Lesson Focus

Our lesson scope covers a period of over twenty years in Jacob's life. Isaac sent Jacob to Haran to find a wife of his mother's kin. Rebekah had proposed this long journey to Isaac, mainly as a means for Jacob to escape from Esau's evil intent to kill him. But the brothers were reconciled after many years, by divine providence, and together buried their father.

The more important events during these years were Jacob's encounters with God. Taken together they reveal a progression in his spiritual walk with God. In the first encounter, at Bethel, Jacob said he was in God's house. Next, at Mahanaim, he said he was with God's host, and thirdly, at Peniel, he said he saw God face to face. Through each step, God effected a change in Jacob, bringing him closer to God. His new name, Israel, reflected this significant change.

In each encounter mentioned above, Jacob revealed his reverence for and worship of God. His commitment of faith and loyalty to God bore fruit in Jacob's posterity, the children of Israel (32:32). Through a faithful line in the children of Israel, God sent the promised Saviour.

God delights in leading His people through the changing scenes of life. Although the man of faith faces difficulties, God is ever present to help him mature in faith.

Throughout his life, Jacob sought and attained God's blessing and favor through faith. But he needed reminders from God, especially during his years with Laban. Jacob's life was not without failure, but through it all God was working with him to bring him closer to Himself.

This lesson focuses on providential incidences in Jacob's life. Prioritize your time to look in more detail at least some of the details of Jacob's three main encounters with God. Notice the way God brings Jacob to a fuller knowledge of Himself. God purposes the same perfection of faith in each one of us. Consider the benediction from Hebrews 13:20-21.

Lesson Aim: To see how God nurtures the perfection of faith in His children.

Theme Verse: [2 Chronicles 16:9](#). For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.

Lesson Text

"This Is ... the House of God"

[Genesis 28:10-19](#)

And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. ¹¹ And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put *them for* his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. ¹² And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I *am* the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; ¹⁴ And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. ¹⁵ And, behold, I *am* with thee, and will keep thee in all *places* whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done *that* which I have spoken to thee of. ¹⁶ And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew *it* not. ¹⁷ And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful *is* this place! this *is* none other but the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heaven. ¹⁸ And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put *for* his pillows, and set it up *for* a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. ¹⁹ And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city *was called* Luz at the first.

"This Is God's Host"

[Genesis 32:1-3](#)

And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. ² And when Jacob saw them, he said, This *is* God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim. ³ And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

[Genesis 32:9-11](#)

And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: ¹⁰ I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. ¹¹ Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, *and* the mother with the children.

"I Have Seen God Face to Face"

Genesis 32:24-32

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. ²⁵ And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. ²⁷ And he said unto him, What *is* thy name? And he said, Jacob. ²⁸ And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. ²⁹ And Jacob asked *him*, and said, Tell *me*, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore *is* it *that* thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. ³⁰ And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. ³¹ And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh. ³² Therefore the children of Israel eat not *of* the sinew which shrank, which *is* upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.

Questions for Study

"This Is ... the House of God"

1. Discuss the details surrounding the four beholds in this section.
2. What was Jacob's response to the heavenly vision?
3. What constitutes an encounter with God today? How should it nurture our faith?

"This Is God's Host"

4. How were the angels of God a timely encouragement for Jacob?
5. How did Jacob describe God's mercies and truth in his life? What is the spiritual analogy for us?

"I Have Seen God Face to Face"

6. Who was the "man" (Hosea 12:4) that wrestled with Jacob, and what did

Jacob receive from him?

7. Why did Jacob say, "My life is preserved"? What can we learn from his attitude?

8. What are the rewards of persevering in prayer?

Analyzing the Passage

Jacob's first encounter with God occurred on the first night of his journey to Haran. In a dream Jacob saw the angels of God "ascending and descending" (28:12) a ladder to heaven. It is significant that the angels moved first from earth to heaven and back again. Thus we gain an insight into God's work of divine providence.

Jacob named the place Beth-el, "the house of God," and a "dreadful" (awe-inspiring) place. Once during the years with Laban, God addressed Himself to Jacob as "the God of Beth-el" (31:13), and later He commanded him to return to Bethel (35:1-15).

The second direct encounter with God occurred on his journey back to Canaan. The place where the angels of God met him, Jacob named Mahanaim (32:2), meaning two hosts or camps. Perhaps the one camp was "God's host," the angels, and the other host was Jacob's entire company. Jacob accepted the angel host as God's ministering spirits. Yet fear gripped him at the report of Esau's coming. He came to God in prayer. Exalting God's mercies and truth, Jacob mentioned that he had passed over Jordan with his staff, representing his few belongings when he left home. Now he had increased to two bands (32:4-8).

Jacob's third direct encounter with God came at a place near Mahanaim, which he called Peniel (32:30), meaning "face of God." The day before, Jacob had sent presents he had prepared for Esau and his family across Jordan. Jacob, left alone, wrestled till daybreak with a "man," an angel (Hosea 12:4), who being unable to overpower Jacob, had the power to give him a limp, and fulfilled Jacob's request for a blessing by changing his name to "Israel" a prince of God having power with God (32:25-29). He was no longer to be Jacob—the supplanter. Such close contact with the angel caused Jacob to feel as if he had seen God face to face.

Principles and Applications

"This Is ... the House of God"

1. Though weary on life's journey, God's children are never alone (28:11-13). "For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"(Hebrews 13:5). To give Jacob assurance, God identified Himself as the God of

Abraham and Isaac. Also to give assurance to Jacob's offspring, the children of Israel, God provided the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness as a daily symbol of His presence. He promised to be their forward and rearward (Isaiah 52:12), and to be by their side. So it is for us today! "Holy Spirit, faithful Guide, / Ever near the Christian's side."

2. The channel of communication between earth and heaven is always open (28:12-15). God in His providence sees to that! In Jacob's dream we get a glimpse of the unseen work of God. "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24). "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33:3).

3. God's promises strengthen the faith of His own (28:13-15). His promises are exceeding great and precious (2 Peter 1:4). They are always positive—"yea, and ... Amen" (2 Corinthians 1:20), and will always come to pass. By faith we believe His Word and trust His grace. "Faith is a living pow'r from heav'n / Which grasps the promise God has giv'n; / Securely fixed on Christ alone, / A trust that cannot be o'erthrown."

4. Encounters with God inspire awe and nurture the perfection of faith (28:16-19).

Today we have God's Word and should not expect the phenomenal (Luke 16:29-31). Special encounters with God are reference points in our spiritual life and spring out of varied circumstances of daily life. Men of faith rest in God's sovereign purpose to nurture our faith to perfection. God's ways to bring us to an encounter with Him are unlimited. They include our initial salvation experience, the discovery of new Scriptural truth, the heartache of deep sorrow, the grievousness of His chastening, the wonder of His love, the greatness of His deliverance, a special rainbow, a magnificent sunset, and the inspiration from the Sunday morning message, or the quiet moments of daily communion alone with Him. Whatever the case, set it for a memorial, pour out the oil of consecration, and pledge anew that the Lord will be your God.

"This Is God's Host"

5. God graciously provides faith-stimulating encouragement when we need it most (32:1-3). God's methods of encouragement to stimulate our faith come in numerous ways—through His Word, through personal and corporate prayer, by a song of cheer, a friendly letter, a message of hope, or a gift of hospitality. His resources are unlimited.

6. The man of faith sees his unworthiness of God's mercy and truth along with his need for deliverance (32:9-11). We must remember that, but for

the mercies of God, we would all be consumed (Lamentations 3:22). God's truth demands punishment for sin, but through Jesus' blood and righteousness, there is mercy and grace. We should thank God for His great mercy, His great salvation, the truth that sets us free, and the hope set before us.

"I Have Seen God Face to Face"

7. The man of faith senses his desperate need of God's blessing (32:26). Life's circumstances demand choices from us. In every choice we need God's direction and blessing. Men of faith never say, "I can handle this myself. I don't need God." But might we act that way sometimes? Are we tempted to doubt God's ability to help us in difficulty? Jacob wrestled hard with God. Moses pled with God in this manner, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (Exodus 33:15). God's promise of His presence is one of His greatest blessings for a man of faith.

8. God's work in the lives of the faithful leaves a positive influence on following generations (32:30-32). "We will not hide them from their children, sheaving to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.... That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (Psalm 78:4, 7).

Important Teachings

1. Though weary on life's journey, God's children are never alone (28:11-13).
2. The channel of communication between earth and heaven is always open (28:12-15).
3. God's promises strengthen the faith of His own (28:13-15).
4. Encounters with God inspire awe and nurture the perfection of faith (28:16-19).
5. God graciously provides faith-stimulating encouragement when we need it most (32:1-3).
6. The man of faith sees his unworthiness of God's mercy and truth along with his need for deliverance (32:9-11).
7. The man of faith senses his desperate need of God's blessing (32:26).
8. God's work in the lives of the faithful leaves a positive influence on following generations (32:30-32).
9. God delights in blessing those who persevere in prayer (32:26-29).

Answers to Questions

1. Discuss the details surrounding the four beholds in this section.

In the first place, "behold a ladder ... to heaven" seems to indicate a way of access. In the next usage, "Behold the angels of God ascending and descending," it is significant that the angels, in their work as ministering spirits (Hebrews 1:14), moved first from earth to heaven and back again. Thus we gain an insight into God's work of divine providence. The third usage, "Behold, the LORD stood above it" shows God's interest and involvement personally. That the LORD God declared Himself as the God of Abraham and Isaac left no question in Jacob's mind regarding the surety of His promise. God's declaration "Behold, I am with thee" was a specific declaration of God's ongoing care and blessing.

2. What was Jacob's response to the heavenly vision?

Jacob said after he awoke, "Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not." Also he said, "How dreadful [awe-inspiring] is this place!" Jacob set up a stone for a memorial and poured on oil—an act of dedication and consecration. He named the place, Beth-el, which means "the house of God." He also made a vow to God

3. What constitutes an encounter with God today? How should it nurture our faith?

Today we have God's Word and should not expect the phenomenal. We should not be seeking an "emotional spiritual high" or a dramatic "strike-down experience" such as many today claim as proof of connection with God. Special encounters with God today are reference points or memorials in one's Christian experience that spring out of circumstances in daily life. God's ways to bring us to an encounter with Him are unlimited.

Whatever the case, we should set it for a memorial, pour out the oil of consecration, and pledge anew that the Lord will be our God. We stand in awe of His Word (Psalm 119:161) and trust Him to keep us faithful to the end.

4. How were the angels of God a timely encouragement for Jacob?

Jacob had just left Laban who, after much accusation and debate, finally came to a covenant agreement with Jacob (chapter 31). Now after hearing that Esau, with four hundred men in arms, was coming to meet him, Jacob was greatly distressed. The angels were a token of God's presence.

5. How did Jacob describe God's mercies and truth in his life? What is the spiritual analogy for us?

Jacob made mention that his staff was virtually all he had when he left home. Now his family and servants were two bands. The spiritual analogy for us is that we come to God without merit of His notice. His truth de-

mands punishment for sin. But His mercy and grace allow us to live. He deserves all the thanks we can give. God's mercy and truth take us from what we are by nature to what we are by grace.

6. Who was the "man" (Hosea 12:4) that wrestled with Jacob, and what did Jacob receive from him?

Hosea 12:4 clearly states that the "man" whom Jacob wrestled with was an angel. The angel gave Jacob a limp, and he fulfilled Jacob's request for a blessing by giving him a new name—Israel, a prince of God, having power with God.

7. Why did Jacob say, "My life is preserved"? What can we learn from his attitude? Apparently, having such close contact with the angel in wrestling seemed to Jacob as if he had seen God face to face, which was not to happen. In Old Testament times, many saints had this prohibition in their mentality. God, at Mt. Sinai, clearly declared it to be so (Exodus 33:20). It was for this reason that Jacob expressed his thankfulness to God for preserving his life. God delights in blessing and answering those who persevere in prayer. Jesus tells us how to pray (Matthew 6). While we are to serve God in reverence and godly fear, yet He enjoins us to come boldly to His throne of grace through Jesus our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16). We are to ask in faith without wavering James 1:5-6 nor fear His austerity Luke 19:21

8. What are the rewards of persevering in prayer?

God promises to answer our prayers! Consider just a few of the many Scriptures with this promise: "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24); "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33:3); "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Matthew 7:7).

Summarizing the Lesson

Nearer, my God, to Thee, / Nearer to Thee;
E'en though it be a cross / That raiseth me;
Still all my song shall be, / Nearer, my God, to Thee.
There let the way appear, / Steps up to heav'n;
All that Thou sendest me / In mercy giv'n;
Angels to beckon me, / Nearer, my God, to Thee.
Or if on joyful wing, / Cleaving the sky,
Caught up to meet my King, / Swiftly I fly,
Still all my song shall be / Nearer, my God, to Thee.

—*Sarah F Adams*

Research Guide

1. Study Hosea 12:3-6, 12. God uses Jacob's strength with God to encourage the children of Israel to repent.
2. Study the whole lesson scope to familiarize yourself with the details of Jacob's life surrounding his encounters with God. His return to Bethel (chapter 35) brought a renewed consecration to God in his journey of faith.
3. Read Hebrews 11:20 for God's record of Jacob's faith.
4. Study other Scriptures that link mercy and truth together as Jacob did in 32:10. Genesis 24:27; Psalms 57:3; 61:7; 85:10; 86:15; 115:1; Proverbs 3:3; 16:6; 20:28.