

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: December 9, 2018
Lesson Title: "Not Alone"
Lesson Passage: Gen. 28:10-22

ABOUT THIS LESSON

This lesson describes a significant event in the life of Jacob, his experience with God at Bethel, where Jacob had an unusual dream that assured him of the presence of the God of his fathers. In response to this vision, he made a vow that included a pledge to give God a tenth of all that he had.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Explain the meaning of "Bethel." (2) Describe Jacob's experience at Bethel. (3) Relate Jacob's Bethel experience to the doctrine of Christian stewardship.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Begin with these comments: Few Old Testament scriptures have been reflected more in religious poetry and hymnody than the passage featured in this week's lesson. One example is the familiar spiritual that goes, "We are climbing Jacob's ladder." And the hymn, "Nearer My God to Thee," is based to a large extent on this passage. Read stanzas 2 and 3 of "Nearer My God to Thee" as class members look at Gen. 28:18-19. Then ask: "But what was Bethel all about? What did it mean to Jacob? And why should it attract the attention of poets and hymn composers through the centuries?" Suggest that this lesson will provide answers to these questions.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Use this outline to guide your treatment of the lesson:

- I. A WEARY WANDERER AND A STONE PILLOW (28:10-11)
- II. A DIVINE REVELATION IN A REMARKABLE DREAM (28:12-15)
- III. A WAYSIDE WORSHIPER AND A CONDITIONAL COVENANT (28:16-22)

2. Lead a discussion of each point, sharing these comments:

I. A WEARY WANDERER AND A STONE PILLOW (28:10-11). Ask your class to examine these verses, then comment: (1) Jacob was a fugitive, running for his life, trying to escape the wrath of his brother Esau (refer to 27:42-44). (2) Exiled from his home, he was a lonely traveler in an empty land. He had come to a bleak, forbidding spot; not an oasis, but just a hilltop covered with barren rock. He must have felt a terrible sense of alienation and despair. (3) He was on his way from Beersheba (where Isaac had settled, Gen. 26:32-33), to Haran, far to the north. (Find Beersheba, Haran and Bethel on a map.)

II. A DIVINE REVELATION IN A REMARKABLE DREAM (28:12-15). Let class members describe what Jacob saw and heard in his dream as they examine vv. 12-15. **COMMENTS:** (1) The word translated "ladder" comes from a Hebrew verb that means literally "to heap up," and could refer to a ramp or stairway. (2) The angels were "ascending and descending" (from earth to heaven and back to earth), rather than coming down from heaven to begin with. (Perhaps this symbolizes the truth that communication between man and God by way of these divine messengers is two-way, rather than only from God to man.) (3) God's promise to Jacob in vv. 13-14 repeats the language of the covenant given to Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3 and Isaac in Gen. 26:3-4. Rather than being an isolated "nobody" lost in a barren land, Jacob is to be an important link in God's master plan. (4) Verse 15 affirms the sovereignty of the living Lord over all the earth (note "I am with thee and will keep thee in all places wherever you go").

III. A WAYSIDE WORSHIPER AND A CONDITIONAL COVENANT (28:16-22). Call attention to Jacob's responses to this unusual dream: (1) God's presence transforms unlikely places into sanctuaries of worship. **EXAMPLES:** [a] Moses at the burning bush in the wilderness. [b] Gideon heard God's call when he was threshing wheat. Paul and Silas turned the prison in Philippi into a place of worship [Acts 16:25]. [c] John Bunyan transformed Bedford jail, where he wrote Pilgrim's Progress, into a "house of God." (2) And Jacob awoke and exclaimed, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it." Let class members tell about places where they have sensed the presence of God. (2) Profound worship experiences instill a sense of awe in the worshiper ("he was afraid," "How dreadful is this place," v. 17). (Compare Isaiah's experience in Isa. 6:1-5.) (3) "Bethel" (v. 19) means "house of God" (v. 17). Jacob had found God in this place where he least expected to meet Him. (Recall "I am with thee...in all places" (v. 15).) (4) Read Jacob's vow in vv. 21-22. Jacob promised to do two things; to erect a "house of God" upon returning to Bethel, and to tithe (v. 22).

3. Suggest two things to be learned about biblical stewardship from this story: (1) Stewardship grows out of a relationship. Before Bethel, Jacob had known God only through his father (note "the Lord thy God" in 27:20). But now he had experienced God directly (notice "my God" in 28:21), and he responded by pledging a tithe. (2) Stewardship is based on the premise that God is the source of everything we have ("of all that thou givest me I will give the tenth to thee").

CLOSING THE LESSON

Refer to Jesus' interpretation of the Bethel experience in his conversation with Nathanael in John 1:43-51: "I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." Jesus is our ladder between heaven and earth!