



EXPLORE THE BIBLE.

Genesis Sermon Series

Supports Session 4: A Stairway

Sermon Title: “Dealing with Life’s Detours” (Genesis 28:10-22)

Connection to Session 4

God promised to protect Jacob on his journey to Haran, and to bless him greatly. Likewise, God gives us guidance and protection day by day as we follow Him.

Introduction/Opening

I was out of seminary for two years before I was called to my first pastorate. That was a very discouraging and frustrating time for me. I believed God had called me into the ministry, and I had all my training, but no church seemed to be interested in me. Was I going to spend the rest of my life working in a department store, packing and shipping mail orders? As I look back, though, I can see God had a purpose in it. In this section of Genesis, Jacob’s life had taken a detour, and it was largely of his own making. Nevertheless, it was all in accordance with God’s plan.

Outline

1. A hazardous situation (vv. 10-11).

- a) Jacob fled to Haran to escape the wrath of his twin brother.
 - i. Esau had vowed to kill Jacob for stealing his blessing (27:41).
 - ii. Jacob’s mother said she wanted to send Jacob to her homeland to find a wife, but she really just wanted to give Esau time to cool down (27:42-46).
- b) We live in a fallen world, and sometimes life seems unfair.
 - i. Sometimes, like Jacob, we bring trouble on ourselves.
 - ii. Other times, trouble arises due to circumstances beyond our control.

2. A heavenly manifestation (vv. 12-15).

- a) During the night, Jacob dreamed of a stairway reaching to heaven.
 - i. It must have been fairly wide since angels were ascending and descending it.
 - ii. God was at the top of the stairway, and He identified Himself to Jacob as the God of Abraham and Isaac.
- b) God reiterated to Jacob the promises He had made to Abraham (see Gen. 12)
 - i. He would give the land on which Jacob rested to him and his descendants.
 - ii. His descendants would be very numerous.
 - iii. All families of the earth would be blessed by his descendants.
- c) The blessings did not come to Jacob immediately, but they did come.
 - i. God works according to His own schedule, so we must trust His timing.

- ii. Like Jacob, we will face hardships along the way.

3. A heartfelt realization (vv. 16-22).

- a) When Jacob awoke, he realized God had spoken to him.
 - i. He took the stone on which he had slept and set it up to mark the spot. He also anointed the stone with oil, symbolizing that it was dedicated to God.
 - ii. He named the place “Bethel,” which means “house of God.”
 - iii. Though Bethel was a sacred site for many years, it later became a center of idolatry (1 Kings 12:28-30).
- b) He made a series of vows to God.
 - i. If God took care of him and brought him home safely, he would worship Him.
 - ii. He would give a tenth of everything he had to God.
- c) Vows are still biblical, but we must keep them in the right perspective.
 - i. God is worthy of our worship regardless of how He blesses us.
 - ii. He blesses us because He is generous, not because we deserve it.
 - iii. Vows are a good way to honor God, but we must always keep them.

Conclusion

God sent Jacob on a detour, but He used the detour to teach Jacob who He is. God still uses detours to teach us. Sometime after I finished seminary, one of my former professors happened to come into the department store where I worked. I told him I did not have any prospects for a pastorate as of yet, and he encouraged me to hang in there. He added, “Working here will give you some good sermon illustrations!” Working in retail not only gave me some good stories that I still use in sermons, but it also taught me some skills that have been very helpful in the pastorate, such as dealing with difficult people and handling tense situations. As I look back, I realize God sent me to work in that store because He wanted to teach me some things I hadn’t learned in school. If God has sent you on a detour, don’t despair. Trust His timing and remember that He often uses these detours to bring His plans to fruition.

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