

Studies in the Life of Jacob
Part 1:

**Jacob's Vision:
The Founding of Bethel**

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Introduction

The clear revelation of God's gracious dealings with man can transform a worldly individual into a worshiper. It is a drama that has been repeated again and again throughout the history of the faith. Perhaps no story in Scripture illustrates this so vividly as Jacob's dream at Bethel, recorded in Genesis 28:10-22. Before this experience Jacob was a fugitive from the results of his sin, a troubled son in search of his place in life, a shrewd shepherd setting out to find a wife. But after this encounter with God he was a partner with Him as a recipient of God's covenant promises and a true worshiper. The transformation is due to God's intrusion into the course of his life.

THE NARRATIVE¹

The story unfolds quickly and dramatically. Being persona non grata in Canaan after deceiving Isaac and receiving the blessing, Jacob went on his way to Haran until things settled down. At sundown he stopped at a "place" and took "one of the stones of the place" to prepare for the night. But in a dream that night God appeared to him from the top of an angel-filled stairway and confirmed that the blessing was indeed his. When Jacob awoke he was afraid because he realized that the Lord was in that place; at dawn he set up the stone as a memorial, named the place Bethel, "the House of God," and vowed to worship there when he returned to his father's house in peace.

THE NARRATIVE'S LITERARY FEATURES

The literary devices in the passage are designed to show that the vision inspired the manner of Jacob's worship and gave new meaning to the place of his vision. The repetition of key terms throughout the narrative ties the whole account together and explains the significance of Jacob's response.² In his dream Jacob saw a stairway standing (מַצְבֵּה) on the earth, and the Lord standing (נֹצֵב) above or by it. This repetition suggests that the stairway functioned to point to the Lord. Then in view of what he saw, Jacob took the stone he had used and set it up as a מַצְבֵּה ("pillar"), this word recalling the previous two. By setting up the stone in this way Jacob apparently wanted to establish forever that he had seen the Lord standing over the stairway. The wordplays then focus the reader's attention on Jacob's vision of the Lord -- the standing stairway pointing to it and the standing stone being a reminder of it.

The repetition of the word ראש also confirms this connection between the two parts. Jacob had seen the stairway with its top (ראשו) in the heavens, and so he anointed the top (על־ראשה) of the stone that he set up in commemoration, a stone he had used for the place of his head (מראשתי).

Moreover, the key words in verses 11-12, the last part of the vision, are reversed in their order in the first part of the response. Jacob saw the stairway reaching to *heaven*, on it the angels of God, and above it *the Lord*. That the central focus is on the Lord is clear from the inversion; what came last in the vision is the first thing Jacob was concerned with. He exclaimed, "*The Lord* is in this place.... This is the house of God; this is the gate of *heaven!*" (vv 16-17).

The story deliberately emphasized the place's insignificance, which leads up to its naming in verse 19. The word "place" (מְקוֹם) is used six times in the story. Verse 11 reports that Jacob came upon a place to spend the night, took one of the stones from the place, and lay down in that place. But in the second half of the narrative, after the theophany, Jacob said, "Surely the Lord is in this place," and "How terrifying is this place!" Then "he named that place Bethel," though it was formerly called Luz (v. 19). It was not an anonymous place after all; there was a city nearby called Luz. But for the sake of this story it was just a "place" until it became Bethel.

The literary features, then, strengthen the development of the motifs of the narrative to show how a place became a shrine, a

stone became an altar, and a fugitive became a pilgrim--God in His grace revealed Himself to Jacob in that place.

THE FUNCTION OF THE NARRATIVE

The two most significant events in the life of Jacob were nocturnal theophanies. The first was this dream at Bethel when he was fleeing from the land of Canaan, which ironically was his by virtue of the blessing. The other was his fight at Peniel when he was attempting to return to the land. Each divine encounter was a life-changing event.

But the location of these episodes in the Jacob stories is strategic. The Bethel story forms the transition from the Jacob-Esau cycle to the Jacob-Laban cycle, and the Peniel story forms the connection back to the Esau story. In each of the encounters with God there is instilled in the patriarch great expectation for the uncertain future. In this incident at Bethel Jacob's vow expresses his anticipation for the future. God would now be with him and help him, even though he might be slow to realize it. The promise of God's presence and protection would bring continued encouragement during the 20 years with Laban.

The parallels between this story and the beginning of Genesis 32 are striking, showing that the story of Jacob's sojourn in Aram is deliberately bracketed with supernatural visions.³ In this story Jacob saw the angels of God (מַלְאָכֵי אֱלֹהִים) on the stairway, but in 32:1 the angels of God (מַלְאָכֵי אֱלֹהִים) met him.⁴ These are the only two places in the Book of Genesis where reference is made to the "angels of God." In addition, in both passages (28:11; 32:1) the construction of the verb "encountered, met" is the same, a preterite form of פָּגַע with the preposition כִּי and the object. In 28:16-17 it is used four times, the last two being in the statement, "This is the House of God, this is the gate of heaven"; and in 32:2 it reappears in the clause "this is the camp of God." Also in both accounts Jacob names the spot, using the same formula for each: "and he named that place ... (וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא) ". And finally, "going" and "the way" (הוֹלֵךְ וַדֶּרֶךְ) in 28:20 are reflected in 32:2.

The stories about Jacob's encounters with God or His angels also form an interesting contrast with the other Jacob stories. Jacob is usually working against another individual in the narratives, first Esau in the Jacob-Esau cycle of chapters 25-27, and then Laban in the Jacob-Laban cycle of chapters 29-31, and then Esau again in 33. The account in chapter 34 of the defile-

ment of Dinah also shows a crisis, though Simeon and Levi figure more prominently in that narrative. But in the encounter passages (28:10-22 at Bethel, 32:2-3 at Mahanaim, 32:23-33 at Peniel, and 35:1-7, 14-15 at Bethel again, the latter forming a conscious liturgical conclusion to the whole complex⁵) Jacob alone is mentioned. Neither Esau nor Laban were with him. In fact Esau never experienced any divine appearance, and Laban received only a warning dream. But when Jacob had these appearances he participated in liturgical acts. The narratives, then, heighten what the Bethel story declares, namely, that Jacob's life functioned on two levels, his conflicts with individuals and his encounters with God. The encounters assured Jacob that he would prevail in the conflicts.

This liturgical motif forms the climax in the Bethel story. In fact Westermann calls the whole story a sanctuary foundation narrative.⁶ It explains how Bethel came to be such an important center for the worship of the Lord. Because God actually met the patriarch on this spot, it was holy ground. Here then was a place where worship was appropriate.

Exegesis

THE SETTING

The story begins with Jacob's departure from Beersheba for Haran. The preceding narrative in Genesis explains the reason for this trip--Esau was threatening to kill him for stealing the blessing. So it was, as Kidner says, that Jacob was thrust from the nest he was feathering.⁷

To be sure, Jacob had obtained the blessing by deception at first, but then had it confirmed by the shaken Isaac (28:1-4) who, realizing what had happened, was powerless to change it (27:37). But were the promises actually his? If he truly was the heir, why must he flee from the land? Would God's blessing be his as it had been Abraham's and Isaac's before him? Nothing less than a sure word from God would ease his doubts and give him confidence for the future.⁸

The narrative unfolds in a disarmingly casual manner. Jacob came upon⁹ a place where he would stay for the night, for the sun had set. The only detail that is mentioned is that he took "one of the stones" at random to lay by his head while he slept.¹⁰ But this casual finding of an anonymous place and taking one of the stones in the darkness of night begins to build suspense.

THE VISION

With an abrupt change of style that brings the vision into the present experience, the narrative introduces the dream. Up to this point the narrative sequence has employed preterites (אִצָּא, וַיֵּלֶךְ, וַיִּפְגַּע, וַיֵּלֶךְ, וַיִּשָּׁם, וַיִּשְׁכַּב, and וַיִּהְיֶה); but this is now broken off abruptly by means of the repetition of הִנֵּה followed by participles. Jacob was surprised by what he dreamed, and the reader is vividly made aware of this. Fokkelman points out that the particle הִנֵּה functions with a deictic force; it is pre- or para-lingual. It goes with a lifted arm, an open mouth: "--there, a ladder! oh, angels! and look, the Lord Himself!"¹¹

The arrangement of the clauses also narrows the focus to the central point of the vision, the Lord. Each clause in Hebrew is shorter than the preceding; the first has seven words, the second six, and the third four:

There was a stairway standing on the earth with its top reaching the heavens, and there were angels of God ascending and descending on it, and there was the Lord standing over it.

Attention is focused first on the setting, then narrowed to the participants, and then to the Lord.¹²

The first thing noticed is the stairway. מֵזֶלֶק, translated "ladder" or "stairway," is a hapax legomenon, a word or form occurring only once in the biblical corpus. It has been traditionally connected to the root לָלַק, "to heap up, cast up." Related nouns are מִסְלָק, "paved way" (but not of a street in a city), and 17b, "a bank, siege-ramp" (2 Sam. 20:15). These suggested etymological connections, however, do not clarify the meaning.

The Greek text translated מֵזֶלֶק with κλίμαξ, which can be translated "ladder" or "staircase." So too is the case with the Latin *scala*. The same uncertainty of meaning prevails with the versions.

Several specific interpretations have been offered for מֵזֶלֶק,¹³ but the one that has the most to commend it is the view that connects the מֵזֶלֶק with Mesopotamian temple towers. The Akkadian word *simmiltu*, cognate to מֵזֶלֶק, provides the link.¹⁴ It is used to describe the "stairway of heaven" extending between heaven and the netherworld with messengers ascending and descending on it.¹⁵ The comparison is certainly an attractive one. Another possible connection is with the celestial ladder

found in the Pyramid Texts of Egypt.¹⁶ But this may be too different. Pyramid text 267 shows that the function of the stairway was to lead the deceased (king) to heaven.

The connection to Akkadian *simmiltu* with the Mesopotamian background is the most probable view. In the myth of "Nergel and Ereshkigal" communication between the netherworld and heaven takes place via the long stairway of heaven that leads to the gate of Anu, Enlil, and Ea.¹⁷ The idea of a ziggurat with its long staircase to the temple top would be behind the idea. Nothing in Genesis 28, however, describes a ziggurat. The most that can be said is that a word used in ziggurat settings is cognate to the word used here, a word that fits the way of communication between heaven and earth.¹⁸ So Hebrew **מִלְּטָם** is appropriate to the point of the story--here was a place that heaven and earth touch, where there is access to God.¹⁹

The second feature of the vision is the angelic hosts "ascending and descending" on the stairway, suggesting their presence on earth along with their access to heaven. Driver writes, "The vision is a symbolic expression of the intercourse which, though invisible to the natural eye, is nevertheless ever taking place between heaven and earth."²⁰

Nothing is said here about the function of the angels; likewise no hint can be found in the corresponding episode at Mahanaim which simply reports that the angels "met him." Other references to angels in Genesis are more helpful. Of course the cherubim in 3:24 guard the way to the tree of life. Then in chapter 18 three visitors came to Abraham, and in chapter 19 two went on to meet with Lot in Sodom. In 18:2 they are simply called "three men." That this may be a manifestation of the Lord is suggested by the context and reinforced by the use of **נְצַבִּים עָלָיו** in 18:2 which corresponds to 28:13. But in 19:1 the two who went to Sodom are called **שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים**. Their task was to rescue Lot before the judgment on the city.

The expression **מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה**, "the angel of the Lord," is used interchangeably with "the Lord" in 22:11, 15. In 48:16 Jacob apparently was referring to the Lord when he said, "The angel (**הַמַּלְאָךְ**) who protects me from all evil bless the lads...."

The activities in these passages are guarding, communicating, rescuing, and protecting. In this vision, then, the angels of God communicated God's protection for Jacob, the recipient of the promises.

The third and central feature of the vision, however, was the Lord who was standing over the stairway.²¹ Later, in Genesis 48, Jacob would identify the Lord as God Almighty (אלֹהֵי שָׁמַיִם), explaining that God had given him the blessing at Bethel.

THE PROMISE

The word of the Lord in this vision took the form of a covenantal communication and extended the patriarchal promises to Jacob. The message begins with the identification of the Lord as the covenant God: "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac." This pattern of self-revelation was used in Genesis 15:7 for Abraham; it also appears in Exodus at the beginning of the covenant (Exod. 20:1) and throughout the Law when God stressed His covenant relationship to His people. The identification of Abraham as the "father" of Jacob shows the latter's continuity with the covenant.

The first part of the revelation guaranteed that Jacob would receive the blessings at first promised to Abraham. The wording of the promises is close to that in Genesis 13:14-16 and 22:17-18. Prominence is attached to the promise of the land, for it is mentioned before the seed promise and stressed by the word order: "The land, upon which you are lying, to you I will give it and to your seed."²² The mention of the seed here would have been encouraging to Jacob who was going to find a wife, and is further elaborated on by the statement that the seed would "break out" and settle in every direction in this Promised Land (cf. 13:12-18).²³ Finally, the promise that all the families of the earth would be blessed in Jacob shows that the Abrahamic blessing had indeed been carried forward to Jacob (cf. 12:3).

These promises given to Jacob so dramatically would have provided him with confidence. Though he had been deceitful in gaining the blessing, God in His grace gave it to him; and even though he was fleeing from his land, God promised to give him the land.

The second part of the revelation guaranteed protection for Jacob in the sojourn. It begins with the promise of God's presence: "Indeed, I will be with you" (וְהָיִיתִי עִמָּךְ). The promise of the divine presence carried God's chosen people through many times of danger and difficulty. It assured them that they did not have to accomplish His plan by themselves. Moses, for example, drew great comfort from this in his early career. When he was afraid to go to deliver the people God said, "Surely I will be with

you (כִּי אֲהִיָּה עִמָּךְ)." The writer of Psalm 46 also realized the benefits of God's presence: "The Lord of hosts is with us (עִמָּנוּ), the God of Jacob is our refuge" [Ps. 46:7, 11]. This passage also brings to mind Isaiah's oracle that promises "God is with us (אֵל עִמָּנוּ)" (7:14).

That God's presence would guarantee safety is verified by the next verb, "and I will keep you." His presence, then, meant that God would be Jacob's "Keeper," so that no harm would come to him wherever he should go.²⁴ Joshua also reminded the people how God had protected them on their sojourn (Josh. 24:17). This is a theme that Psalm 121 develops for the pilgrim on his way to Jerusalem, where he would hear the high priestly blessing announce the same divine intent: "The Lord bless you and keep you" (Num. 6:24). The promise of divine protection does not exclude conflict and tension, but it does guarantee the outcome for the good of the covenant and its recipient.

The promise concludes with the statement that God will restore Jacob to the land to receive the promises. The statement "I will not forsake you *until* I shall have done" need not imply that once God fulfills the blessing He will abandon Jacob; rather, it provides assurance that the promises just made will be fulfilled. God's protective presence will work toward the fulfillment of the promise.

THE REALIZATION

When Jacob awakened he was overwhelmed with the fact that the Lord was "in this place" (v 16). He had never imagined that this rather ordinary place could be a holy place. Jacob here realized what God had promised--His presence was with him. Jacob's attitude of fear was appropriate for such a meeting with the Lord. The term "fear" is used in the Bible to describe a mixture of terror and adoration, a worshipful fear (cf. Exod. 19:16). People may *revere* the Lord (the positive, worshipful, aspect of the word), but when they comprehend more fully His sovereign majesty, they shrink back in fear. All worshipful acts must begin with and be characterized by reverential fear at the presence of the Lord (Exod. 3:6; 19; Ps. 2:11). Of Jacob, Bush says, "His feelings upon awakening were those of grateful wonder mingled with emotions of reverential awe, bordering close upon dread."²⁵

Jacob realized that this place was holy: "How frightening is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is

the gate of heaven." Here the motif of "house" is first introduced (*בֵּית אֱלֹהִים*, house of God). By using this term Jacob designated the place as a shrine. No literal house was there, nor an actual gate. But it would now be known as a place where people could find access to God, where God could be worshiped. He had "seen" God in the heavens, and so God's "house" on earth was man's gate to the heavens.

THE WORSHIP

Devotion. Early in the morning Jacob arose and stood the stone up as a pillar at which he could express his submission through worship. The preparation for worship by setting up a pillar raises questions about the custom. Graesser shows how standing stones in the ancient world would serve as markers, arresting the attention of the onlooker because they were not in their natural position.²⁶ Such a standing stone had to have been put that way; it would mark a grave (Rachel's pillar in Gen. 35:20), form a boundary (the treaty with Laban in Gen. 31:45), note some important event (Samuel's Ebenezer in 1 Sam. 7:12), or, as here, mark out a sacred area where God could be "found," where prayer could reach Him. This pillar would be a commemoration of the vision, recalling the stairway to heaven.

Jacob's offering took the form of oil poured on top of the stone, perhaps pointing to the Lord at the top of the stairway. Pouring the oil before the Lord was a gift to God, for it conveyed much the same attitude as making a sacrifice. It was a symbolic ritual act by which Jacob demonstrated his devotion to the Lord and consecrated the spot as holy to Him. Later, oil was used in worship to sanctify the holy places and holy things (Lev. 8:10-11). So this duly consecrated altar served to commemorate the appearance, express the patriarch's devotion, and guarantee the seriousness of the oath of the worshiper (cf. Gen. 12:8; 13:18; 26:25).

Commemoration. According to the story Jacob named the place "Bethel" because God had come near to him there. This naming actually transformed the place from being merely a Canaanite town called Luz into God's "house" for Jacob and his descendants to use for worship.²⁷

Modern scholarship suggests that this spot was an original Canaanite shrine or sanctuary city, founded before the time of Abram and dedicated to the god El. Von Rad says that Bethel must have been known as a cult center before the time of Israel

because a god named Bethel was worshiped there.²⁸ It is true that the name "Bethel" does not always seem to be a place name but at times is a divine name, perhaps developing metonymically through association with a shrine.²⁹ The evidence for this deity does not, however, include Phoenician or Ugaritic literature, and so the presentation of such a deity for the second millennium B.C. in Canaan cannot be convincingly defended. As far as the Hebrew account is concerned, the name of Bethel derives its significance from the fact that the Lord appeared to Jacob there. The motivation for the name came in the speech of verse 17 which is a stylized reaction to the theophany (cf. Judg. 6:22; 13:22; Gen. 16:13b; Exod. 20:18; Deut. 5:24).³⁰

This part of the passage develops the theme of "house." The key is the patriarch's exclamation, "This is the House of God." He then preserved the vision by naming the place "House of God." But the word **בֵּית** is repeated in verses 21a, b, and 22a. It is as if this fugitive was saying that when he returned to settle in the land God would settle with him. God would go with him and bring him back to his father's "house" in peace. When he returned, there would be a "house" for God in the Promised Land.

Dedication. Jacob's promise to worship God at Bethel was solemnized by oath. Vows were not made to induce God to do something He was not willing to do. They were made to bind the worshiper to the performance of some acknowledged duty. Jacob made his vow on the basis of what God had guaranteed to do. So he was taking God at His word and binding himself to reciprocate with his own dedication.

The oath then must be divided between a protasis and an apodosis--"if... then." It is not easy to determine just where to make this division. The protasis should form the foundation for his promise and should include what God had promised to do. The apodosis should record what Jacob wanted to do for God. So the most appropriate place to start the apodosis may be in verse 22. The vow would then read:

If the Lord God is with me,
and keeps me in this way in which I am going,
and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear,
so that I return in peace to the house of my father,
and the Lord becomes my God,
then this stone which I set up as a pillar
will be the house of God,
and all which you give me a tenth I will give to you (author's
trans.).³¹

God had promised to be with him, keep him, bless him, return him in peace, in short, be his God; consequently, Jacob promised that the spot would be a place of worship and that he would tithe.

The vow to tithe is the only part of Jacob's promise that is a real action. Moreover, the structure of the speech changes to the second person in a personal address to God directly. His gratitude and submission to God would be expressed through the paying of a tithe.

So Jacob did more than consecrate Bethel as a place of worship for the nation of Israel. He himself was moved to worship there, and his acts formed a pattern for later worshipers to follow in the offering of their devotion and their substance to God.

Conclusion

This brief account tells how God deals graciously with His covenant people. It tells how God suddenly and unexpectedly broke into the life of the deceiver who was fleeing for his life, and assured him of the covenantal promises and His protective presence. But the point of the narrative is the effect on Jacob's life--he worshiped and prepared for the worship of his descendants at this "House of God."

The didactic level of the story for Israel would be clear. Jacob, who represents Israel in the story, who was anything but obedient at the outset, would spend a number of years outside the land (cf. Gen. 15:13-16). During that time God would protect and bless him (cf. Exod. 1:7, 12, 20) and ultimately return him to his inheritance. Such covenantal blessings should inspire worshipful devotion from God's people (cf. Exod. 5:1; 14:29-15:21; Josh. 4:19-24; 8:30-31).

The Christian experience is similar. The effectual revelation of God's protective presence and promised blessings for Christians will inspire devout and faithful worship. Those who fully realize God's gracious provision, those whom the Word of God has powerfully impressed, will respond with consecration and commitment. Where there is no reverential fear, no commitment or no devotion, there is probably very little apprehension of what the spiritual life is all about. Like the revelation to Jacob, the written revelation of God makes the believer aware of the Lord's presence and prompts him to a higher level of living.

Notes

- 1 The critical analysis of this passage is rather complex. Long says that J is partially preserved in verses 10, 13, 15, 16, and 19, but that it is now overlaid and dominated by E in verses 11, 12, 17, 18, and 20-22 (Burke O. Long, *The Problem of Etiological Narrative in the Old Testament* [Berlin: Alfred Topelmann, 1968], p. 60). Von Rad's combination is different. He argues that verses 16 and 17 are parallel, as are 19a and 22a, and he then takes verses 13-16 and 19 as J, and verses 10-12, and 17-22 (except 19) as E (Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961], p. 278). According to von Rad only J contains the etymological formula on the name. Even if a case could be made convincingly for these sources, and if there was agreement on the divisions, one would still be left with the difficulties and tensions in the final, fixed form of the text. All the ideas in the story were apparently understood as a unified tradition of the founding of Bethel. Moreover, the literary design of the account bolsters its unity. The problem of the parallel passage in Genesis 35 could then also be understood as a stylistic device of confirmation and recapitulation.
- 2 The author is indebted to Fokkelman's discussion of the basic ideas about the literary features of this passage (J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* [Assen, Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975], pp. 65-81).
- 3 Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), pp. 53-54.
- 4 C. Houtman, "Jacob at Mahanaim: Some Remarks on Genesis 32:2- 3," *Vetus Testamentum* 28 (1978):39. See also Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, p. 198. Fishbane adds that **יָצָא לָךְ** is a theme word in chapter 32, referring to both the angels of God and the messengers sent to Esau (*Text and Texture*, p. 54).
- 5 Westermann develops the idea of these liturgical acts that belong to Jacob exclusively (Claus Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers*, trans. David E. Green [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980], p. 90).
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- 7 Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1967), p. 155.
- 8 The effect of this gracious revelation in Genesis 28 appears to have had just such an effect. In 29:1 the text says "And Jacob picked up his feet and went." In other words, with this assurance from God Jacob had a new gait in his steps.
- 9 The verb **יָקַף** adds to the note of casualness. It means "to encounter, meet." Fokkelman translates it "he struck upon" a place (*Narrative Art*, p. 48).
- 10 It is unlikely that a stone large enough to be a pillar should be a pillow. The word signifies what is at the head. It is used in 1 Samuel 26:7 in the same way: Saul lay sleeping within the trench, with his spear stuck in the ground "at his head."
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52. The KJV of course uses "behold" in all three places, as does the NASB. The Niv has not reflected the impact of **וַיִּבֶן** by translating the verses, "He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord...."
- 12 It is interesting to note that the next chapter uses **וַיִּבֶן** in a similar way. It first introduces the setting, "there is a well in the field" (29:2); then the participants, "and oh, there are three flocks of sheep lying by it" (29:2); and then the focus of the story, "and look, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep" (29:6). By the repetition of this pattern the narrative shows a direct correspondence between the sections, the second being the beginning of the outworking of the first.
- 13 Some of these area temple tower with a pathway winding around it, a tower with a stairlike entrance, and a staircase leading into a palace (see C. Houtman, "What Did Jacob See in His Dream at Bethel?" *Vetus Testamentum* 27 [1977]:337-52;

A. Henderson, "On Jacob's Vision at Bethel," *Expository Times* 4[1982]:151; and C. A. Keller, "Über einige alttestamentlichen Heiligtumslegenden I," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 67 [1955]:141-68.

14 The connection between מִלְּטָא and *simmltu* involves a metathesis (see Sabatino Moscati, *An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages* [Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1964], p. 63).

15 The view was first presented by Landsberger ("Lexikalisches Archiv," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 41 [1933]:230); it is discussed briefly in Harold R. Cohen, *Biblical Hapax Legomena in the Light of Akkadian and Ugaritic* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), p. 34. For the relevant texts see O. R. Gurney, "The Myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal," *Anatolian Studies* 10 (1960):105-31; and "Nergal and Ereshkigal-Additions," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3d ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969):507-12.

16 J. G. Griffiths, "The Celestial Ladder and the Gate of Heaven f Gen. 28:12 and 17]," *Expository Times* 76 (1964/65):229-30; and "The Celestial Ladder and the Gate of Heaven in Egyptian Ritual," *Expository Times* 78 (1966/67):54-55.

17 A. R. Millard, "The Celestial Ladder and the Gate of Heaven (Gen. 28:12, 17)," *Expository Times* 78 (1966/67):86-87.

18 If there is an implied connection to the ziggurat here, then this passage forms an antithesis to the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis which also has a Mesopotamian background. Comparing the two passages one could say that if there is communication between heaven and earth it is initiated in heaven (Gen. 28) and not on earth (Gen. 11).

19 Christ compared Himself to the stairway in John 1:51: "and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." He is the Mediator between heaven and earth; He is the Way to God.

20 S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Methuen & Co., 1904), p. 265.

21 The prepositional phrase can be translated "over it" or "beside it" or "beside him." The use in Genesis 18:1 suggests "beside him," but the context here suggests "over it" because God's realm is in the heavens, and because Jacob anointed the top of the stone.

22 The purpose of the *casus pendens* is to throw the independent nominative to the beginning for emphasis.

23 Fokkelman observes what he calls a sound fusion, a melting of consonants in the transition: פֶּרַח־אֶרֶץ is followed by פֶּרַח־אֶרֶץ ; the letters פֶּרַח־אֶרֶץ out of the prepositional phrase become the verb. He says, "The levels of sound and meaning have become integrated: they point to each other, they explain each other, they pervade each other" (*Narrative Art*, p. 59).

24 One clear example of this is Genesis 31:24 which records how God warned Laban in a dream not to harm Jacob (see also v. 29).

25 George Bush, *Notes on Genesis*, 2 vols. (New York: Ivison and Phinney & Co., 1860), 2:109.

26 C. F. Graesser, "Standing Stones in Ancient Palestine," *Biblical Archaeologist* 35 (1972):34-63.

27 The shrine later became the place of corrupt, idolatrous worship (2 Kings 12. 28-29). Hosea alluded to this passage but altered the name by a wordplay from בֵּית־אֵל to בֵּית־אֵוֶן , "house of vanity" (i.e., idols, Hos. 4:15). Amos 5:5 said that "Bethel shall come to nothing" (i.e., be destroyed), but expresses this with

28 Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 286.

29 Some biblical passages may suggest "Bethel" could be used as a divine epithet. Jeremiah 48:13 says that "Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence." Zechariah 7:2 could be interpreted to read "Bethel-shar-ezer," a personal name, instead of "the house of

the god Sharezer" (see J. Philip Hyatt, 'A Neo-Babylonian Parallel to Bethel-sar-eser, Zech. 7:2,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 56 [1937]:387-94; and "The Deity Bethel and the Old Testament," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 59 [1939]:81-98). Support for the theophoritic element "Bethel" in names comes from Babylonian names like *bit-ili-sezib* and *bit-ili-sar-usur*, as well as some attested in Elephantine: *Bethel-natan*, *Bethel-nuri*, and *Anat-bethel*. (See Otto Eissfeldt, "Der Gott Bethel," *Andover Review* [1930]:20 [reprinted in *Kleine Schriften II*; Rudolph Kittel, "Der Gott Bet' el," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 44 [1925]:123-53; Wolf Wilhelm Grafen Baudissin, "El Bet-el [Genesis 31:13; 35:71]," *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 41 [1925]:1-11; and W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1942], pp. 169-75. In addition, see the list of 32 names with this element from Elephantine in Bezael Porten, *Archives from Elephantine* [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968], p. 328).

30 Long, *Etiological Narrative*, p. 60.

31 Many translations begin the apodasis with "then the Lord will become my God," which is equally possible. If God actually promised to be his God in the words of the Abrahamic promises (as in Gen. 17:7), then it would not be something Jacob would be promising to do.

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