

**Foundations: Jacob II--BEING FEARFUL**  
**Genesis 28:10-22 (AFBC 9/17/17)**

10 Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. 11 When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. 12 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.

13 There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying.

14 Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. 15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

16 When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." 17 He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." 18 Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. 19 He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz. 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear 21 so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God 22 and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."

Have you ever been fearful? Maybe we all have some fears and concerns, but I'm talking about a time when you were genuinely afraid. Perhaps you felt your life was in danger, or the life of someone you love.

Our nation has recently been affected by two hurricanes which caused great fear for those who found themselves in their path...

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And then there's the news coming out of North Korea—the threats and counter-threats, and military leaders warning of the very dire

consequences that would result from any type of military action by either side. What if you had a loved one stationed in South Korea—would this make you fearful?

In our text for today, we find Jacob at a fearful moment in his life. He's travelling alone. The sun has set so it's now dark—which has a way of multiplying our fears—you know, those "things that go bump in the night!"

Added to this, Jacob's on the run because he knows he's done things he shouldn't have done and made enemies who could well be lurking somewhere out in that darkness just waiting for the right opportunity to do him in!

This morning, I want us to think together about "Being Fearful." As I read our text for today, I'm convinced that Jacob was dealing with many negative emotions, fear certainly being among them. He was on his way from Beersheba to Haran, a journey of about 450 miles.

We read the part about Jacob taking this trip, but we didn't read why it was necessary. The answer to that is found in our text for last Sunday, where we saw how Jacob and his mother, Rebekah, concocted a sinister scheme to steal his father Isaac's blessing from his brother, Esau.

This was a big deal—the blessing meant that Jacob would be the leader of the family and control most of his father's considerable wealth. Isaac was deceived into blessing Jacob instead of his big brother; and this, as you might expect, made Esau angry—so angry, that the only thing that would console him was the thought of how good it was going to feel to exact revenge on his poor excuse for a brother, Jacob.

Realizing Esau's intentions, Jacob decides this might be a good time to take a little trip. Actually, it would have been a BIG trip for that day and time—all the way to Haran where his uncle Laban lived.

Jacob gets as far away from Beersheba as he can on the first day; and then, as it's getting dark, he decides it's probably safe to try and get some rest. The accommodations aren't great, though.

There's no place to stay, so he improvises. He stretches out on the ground. Trying to make the best of it, Jacob puts a rock under his head for a pillow. I don't know how he had missed all the "My Pillow" commercials, but he used a rock.

Maybe rocks were softer back then.... I think you would have to be awfully tired to sleep that way. I really don't know, however, if Jacob was more tired...or more fearful.

Whether or not anything had ever frightened him before, this was surely a very scary experience. Again, he's alone and far from home. It's dark; and Jacob knows that because of what he did to his brother, Esau is out to get him.

Of course, he had tried to keep his travel plans a secret--but who knows? Maybe Esau heard something. Maybe he's following him. Jacob's frightened—filled with the fear that he may never see the light of day again!

So what do you think? Do you reckon Jacob just dropped right off to sleep? Or did he spend some time in that darkness thinking about how he'd lived his life so far--making his own rules and trying to cheat his way to the top.

Now look where that had gotten him—out in the middle of nowhere, trying to catch a little shut-eye in spite of the fact that he's way too worried--and much too uncomfortable as well--to sleep.

Jacob's in an awful mess. He thought he had connived his way into the lion's share of the family inheritance; but now he doesn't know if he'll ever even be able to go back there--to his home.

He's all alone. He has no idea if he'll be able to find a job or a place to live. And along the way, he has to worry about bandits, wild animals, and his out-for-revenge brother.

Man, he has a lot to fear! Have you ever had some "dark nights of the soul" when you were overcome by fear?

Perhaps you brought the situation on yourself like Jacob, or maybe you have no idea why things had happened the way they did. You just knew that, whenever it was and whatever the

circumstances, it had never before been that dark in your life, and you had never been so afraid!

How do we get through that kind of darkness--that thick, penetrating darkness that gets inside of us and makes us wonder if we'll ever see the light again? How do we cope with such fear?

Well, in the middle of this dark night, Jacob has a dream; and his dream reminds us of things that can help get us overcome our fears—just as, in fact, they helped Jacob. Here are four approaches that I encourage you to consider:

1. First, when fearful: **REMEMBER GOD'S PROMISES.** The first thing God does is to remind Jacob of His promises. To paraphrase verses 13 & 14, God says, "I made a promise to your father Isaac and your grandfather Abraham to give you this very land upon which you now sleep, and to bless the whole world through your offspring--and I will do it. I will keep my promise."

When you consider that Jacob, by going to Haran, was leaving the Promised Land, and that he had no descendants—not even a wife at that moment--when you consider these important factors, this promise that he would not only own the land but also fill it with descendants—had to be very encouraging.

At this point, Jacob was wondering if he could ever even return to this land or have children there, so God's promise to him is very reassuring. We must cling to God's promises when it's dark.

When you and I face troubling times, we need to go to our Bibles and remember what God has promised us. We can worry ourselves sick and let the darkness overwhelm us. Or... we can be sustained by the promises of God. The choice is ours.

2. Second, when we're fearful, we need to **REMEMBER GOD'S PRESENCE.** We can face an uncertain future with much greater confidence if we know and believe that God is with us. Jacob needed to realize this; and in verse 15, God says to him, "I am with you!" Jacob may have FELT alone, but he never WAS alone!

Neither are we, friends! God is with us. Remembering His presence has always been a source of strength for the faithful. David said in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow" (i.e., a dark place)—"the valley of the shadow of

death" (i.e., even in the darkest of all the dark places), "I will fear no evil, for you are with me."

Before He ascended to the Father, Jesus assured his disciples, "Surely I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28) And Hebrews 13:5 says, "God will never leave us nor forsake us." Evidently God wants us to know He's always near.

I heard a story about a family that was taking a cross-country trip by train. It was getting late, and they made their way to the sleeper car. Before Dad and Mom and big brother settled into their sleeping berths, they all went and tucked little Jenny into bed. Then they climbed into their own berths to go to sleep.

It was dark, and as quiet as it can get on a train. Everybody had settled in for the night...when little Jenny whimpered, "Mommy, are you there?" "Yes, honey," she said, "I'm here. And God is here with you too."

A few moments later, she called out again, "Daddy, are you there?" "Yes, Jenny, I'm right here. Don't worry. Mommy's right—God is here with you too."

A short time later, another cry, "Billy, are you there?" At this point, there was a deep and somewhat irritated voice that said, "Yes, little girl, your mother, your father, your big brother, they're all here. Now, be quiet... so we can all get some sleep!"

There was a long silence; and then an even more frightened little Jenny asked, "Mommy... was that God?"

We talk a lot about God's presence, but maybe we don't really expect Him to show up! God's word to us today, however, is the same as it was to Jacob many centuries ago: "I am with you."

Now, this doesn't mean we'll avoid all the dark valleys of life. It simply means we'll never be alone in the dark, and God will give us peace and confidence even in the very depths of the darkness.

3. A third approach now: when fearful, **REMEMBER GOD'S PROTECTION**. God assures Jacob in verse 15, "I am with you and will watch over you." In other words, "I'm going to protect you on this journey."

This didn't mean that Jacob would never encounter difficulty and pain; but it did mean that God would protect him so that His plans could come to fruition. Jacob did not have to be paralyzed by the fear of his brother, or thieves, or wild animals, or anything else. God had good plans for his life, and He would protect him.

We don't need to be afraid either, friends—but, hey, if you really want to worry, take your pick: 1) terrorists, maybe, or 2) diseases—West Nile Virus should be a good one to worry over—those pesky mosquitoes are everywhere! Then there are 3) storms, and 4) criminals, and 5) undocumented aliens. And let's not leave out 6) Kim Jong-Un, or our own President—they both seem a bit wacky at times, don't they?

Listen, we may lose our shirts, or even our lives; but as people of faith, we know that God is with us. So even when it's very dark, we don't give in to fear. The message here is to remember, and put our trust in, God's protection.

I heard someone describe the way God protects us like this: God protects us from harm, but not necessarily from hurt. We may be hurt by others, we may be hurt by life, or we may be hurt by sickness and even death--but God protects us from being harmed by these hurts.

It's like when we take our children to get immunized—the shots hurt them, of course, but we trust that they do not harm them. Now, I know there are those who claim they do, but just follow what I'm saying here.

The needle hurts; but we would not put them through this if we did not trust that our children would benefit from the shots in the long run. So we do this even though, if left to them, they would likely choose to avoid the shots altogether.

In the same way, God doesn't protect US from the hurts of life either--we still must go through them--but He does protect us from harm. Because He is with us in those hurtful times, we fear no evil—we fear no ultimate harm.

So when we're fearful, we need to: 1) remember God's promises; 2) His presence; and 3) His protection. And one more:

4. When fearful, we should **REMEMBER GOD'S PROVISION.**

In verse 15, God says to Jacob, "I will...watch over you." This promise has a double meaning. The word translated "watch" means to protect, but also to provide for and take care of.

This word is first used back in Genesis 2:15 where God instructs Adam to "take care" of the Garden of Eden—in other words, to provide whatever it needs. So God is promising to both provide for Jacob's needs as well as to protect him from harm.

Jacob understands this. He clearly expects God to both watch over him on his journey and also to provide him with food and clothing. We hear this in verse 20: **"Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear...'"**

He's looking to God to protect him and provide for his needs. God has always promised to provide for the needs of His people.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds us that the Father knows we have needs. And He says that since the Father provides for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, we can rest assured that God will provide for our needs as well.

So, we remember the promise of God's provision. Maybe you question why this promise is even relevant to those of us who are so materially blessed. But maybe we need to hear this most of all... since the more we have, the more we seem to want—even if our over-consumption takes away from those who have less.

We have so much, friends—so do we really need to worry? Could it be that we carry around inside of us a lot of unnecessary fears and harmful anxieties?

God has promised to provide for His children. Maybe we'd be a lot better off if we worried less and put more trust in the Father's provision.

Okay, anybody here still afraid of the dark? Trust in God's promises, His presence, His protection and provision. Grow up, Christian! You have no reason to fear!

**Anthem / Solo: Holy Ground / Holy, Holy, Holy**