

Jacob 4 - Encountering God

1. Encountering God

Jacob had just finished cheating Esau out of his blessing and was forced to flee from him for his life. With Isaac's blessing, Jacob headed out for his mother's people to obtain a wife.

On his way, Jacob passed through a place where his grandfather, Abraham, had come to when he was on his way *into* the land of Canaan. It was called *Bethel*, the house of God, and had been memorialized because Abraham had met with God at the beginning of his sojourn in the land and built an altar there.

Gen 12:6-8 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite *was* then in the land.

7And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

8And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, *having* Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.

Now, as Jacob passes through this area, he, too, has an encounter with God.

Gen 28:11-15 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.

12And 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.

13And, 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;

14And 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.

15And, 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.

We don't want to be superstitious and suppose that this spot had some kind of spiritual power as though it was some mystical inter-dimensional gateway to the spirit world. We don't see anything like this happening again in any other time that Bethel is mentioned. Man is impressed with spooky powers and will look for the supernatural which is why there is so much idolatry in the world.

What you want to notice is God's affirmation of His plan and how His will is not going to be averted. He told Abraham that He was going to give him the land of Canaan at Bethel. Now with Jacob on his way *out* of the land, God appeared to *him* and let Him know that this plan was going to move forward. This promise is a reflection of the grace and goodness of God. There is nothing mentioned here about the character of Jacob that he should think that this was some kind of special reward for his behavior. God has His plan of redemption that He is going to fulfill and Jacob just gets to go along for the ride. In our disposable planned obsolescence culture we are not as in tune with the provision for our posterity the way many others have been in history. God was extending His grace from Abraham, through Isaac, and now through Jacob, and on in to history. Later, when the children of Israel came back from their time in Egypt, God reminded them that it

was by His sheer grace that they were getting to take possession of the land.

Deut 9:1-6 Hear, O Israel: Thou *art* to pass over Jordan this day, to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself, cities great and fenced up to heaven, 2A people great and tall, the children of the Anakims, whom thou knowest, and *of whom* thou hast heard *say*, Who can stand before the children of Anak!

3Understand therefore this day, that the LORD thy God *is* he which goeth over before thee; *as* a consuming fire he shall destroy them, and he shall bring them down before thy face: so shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them quickly, as the LORD hath said unto thee.

4Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the LORD thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD doth drive them out from before thee.

5Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

6Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou *art* a stiffnecked people.

This is the very definition of grace. Israel had been a stiffnecked people, which God described in the rest of the chapter but He was *still* going to bless them. In salvation, God extends His grace to us by giving us eternal life which we don't and never will deserve.

We are careful to point out that grace is not cheap as though God just looks away when we sin. God in His righteousness must still demand justice, but by His grace He paid the price of the judgment Himself by having His Son take the penalty for our sinfulness.

This, then, is the declaration of God's grace. Jacob, later named Israel, and his descendants were going to get the land, but it was never offered as some reward for his or their goodness. The fulfillment of that promise will be glorious in the Millennium, but it has been rough going as God has dealt with them in their stiffnecked way. Similarly, when we enter into glory we will be delivered from the flesh, temptation, and sin, but along the way till we get there, there will be judgment in our lives as we sojourn here on earth.

God, through this dream, had given Jacob a glimpse into the spiritual world, but that was not limited to that specific place. Our five senses are tuned to deal with the physical world around us. We can only see a certain spectrum of light, but some animals have photo receptors that respond beyond that light range. They can see things we can't. The spiritual world is also outside our range to observe, but every once in a while God opened up people to see those spiritual things going on around them. The Bible describes how there are spiritual battles that go on beyond our ability to see them.

Eph 6:10-12 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.

God spoke to Jacob in a dream, but that is only one way in which we encounter God. We encounter God and

are touched by Him as He reaches out to us in numerous ways.

- The witness of the inner light
There is not a soul on earth that God has not reached out to directly.

John 1:1-9 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2The same was in the beginning with God.

3All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

4In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

5And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

...

9*That* was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

- The witness of nature
The very existence of nature all around us is a testament to the presence of God.

Ps 19:1-3 To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

2Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

3*There is* no speech nor language, *where* their voice is not heard.

Rom 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;
19Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them.

20For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are

clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

On the internet, "Professor Dave" likes to explain scientific stuff on his website. Even though a Master's degree was outside of his reach, he decided to criticize Dr. James Tour anyway and discredit him because of his religious belief in the work of God's creation of life. Dr. Tour produced a 14 video series in response, which makes you feel embarrassed for Professor Dave.¹ In the series, Dr. Tour deals with the impossibility of life generating from non-life which leaves us in awe of the power of God.

- The presence of God

God, Himself, is all around us. You can't escape encountering Him.

Acts 17:24-28 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

25Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

26And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

27That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

28For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

- The testimony of the Word of God

¹www.youtube.com/watch?v=71dqAFUb-v0&list=PLILWudw_84t2THBvJZFyuLA0qvwxrIBDr

We encounter God through the power of His Word. We want to be careful to note that the effect of His Word can be positive or negative, but we *will* respond to it. We will either embrace it and be enlightened or reject it and be darkened, but we *will* be affected by it.

Isa 55:6-11 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:

7Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

8For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

9For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

11So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it.

- The testimony of the Spirit of God

No one escapes an encounter with God. The Holy Spirit has gone out to the whole world to convict mankind of the need and provision of salvation in Christ.

John 16:7-11 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

8And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

9Of sin, because they believe not on me;
10Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;
11Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

How are we able to recognize right and wrong? Because God won't let you *not* know it. Man tries to declare righteousness by what is, for the most part, common convenience. But without God, when man says something is right or wrong, what he means is "I like this," or "I don't like this." Moral righteousness can only come from God.

2. Responding to God

We cannot escape an encounter with God. In spite of that, people will *still* try to resist. Jesus tells us about two men, one rich, the other a beggar, who died. In Hell, the rich man realizes there is no relief and asks Abraham to send someone from the dead to warn his brothers, which, of course, is impossible.

Luke 16:29-31 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.
30And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.
31And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

There is an eternal Hell to face but if someone is not disposed to the testimony of God they will not believe even though someone should rise from the dead. In fact, someone, Jesus Christ, *did* rise from the dead and His resurrection lies at the crux of faith and eternity. When men try to deal with the Christ, they ultimately arrive at the resurrection and it is at the resurrection that salvation takes place.

As we go back to Jacob before God, we want to recognize that it was *not* at this time that he became right with Him.

That is going to come later.

Gen 28:16-22 And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew *it* not.

17And 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.

18And 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.

19And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city *was called* Luz at the first.

20And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on,

21So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God:

22And this stone, which I have set *for* a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.

It might look like Jacob became a true believer, but one can acknowledge the existence of God and God, Himself, but still not be a true believer. The emphasis is on the word *true*. Jacob was not won over and submitted to God yet. He recognized that he was in a place that ought to bring out a holy dread. He built a memorial there and anointed it with oil. However, Jacob's relationship with God at this point is *conditional*! Notice in vs. 20 that he says "*If* God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; *then* shall the LORD be my God."

Unfortunately, this is the route that people take to knowing God. It is always a blessing when you encounter someone who is ready to yield their heart to God, but we have to deal with people at

whatever point they are in their discovery of God. Jacob was just not there yet.

The Bible is filled with God's interaction with man and how men responded. Each one had their reasons for their response but they all had in common a willingness or lack of willingness. William James in *The Will to Believe* offered a justification for belief when there is an *apparent* lack of evidence for belief. A couple of the factors included:

- When you have a forced and unavoidable option to believe or not.
- When your option is momentous and not trivial. The stakes are significant.

Death and eternity are unavoidable and momentous. Standing before God is unavoidable and momentous. The evidence and testimony of God is not insignificant. And yet, people's experience is not all equal. We have to consider the context in which people find themselves. Some of the context of people's experience includes:

- The spiritual quality of the culture they live in
- Their knowledge and awareness of the Word of God
- Their own sense of maturity
- Their consciousness of the eternal
- How often they resisted or gave in to the prompting of the Holy Spirit
- How much they recognize the hand of God in life

Jesus said to Pilate, "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." Pilate answered, "What is truth?" Pilate's encounter with Christ was unavoidable and momentous. He turned away from Christ, but Christ might have answered, not "You can't *handle* the truth," but "You *won't* handle the truth!"

Paul met Jesus on the Damascus road.

Acts 9:4-6 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

5And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

6And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

Paul knew the Word of God. Paul thought he was very engaged in serving God (killing those he thought were heretics). But Paul's encounter with Christ was unavoidable and momentous. His response was "Lord, what will thou have me to do?"

Pharaoh had an unavoidable and momentous encounter with God, but he hardened his heart and was buried when the parted waters came crashing down because he just couldn't give in after plague after plague had proved his gods powerless.

The context we find ourselves in does not *determine* how we will respond. We choose to respond to our context.

Matt 13:12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

We can respond at any time, but the time will wear itself out.

Prov 1:20-33 Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets:

21She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, *saying,*

22How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning,

and fools hate knowledge?

23 Turn you at my reproof:
behold, I will pour out my spirit
unto you, I will make known my
words unto you.

24 Because I have called, and ye
refused; I have stretched out my
hand, and no man regarded;

25 But ye have set at nought all
my counsel, and would none of
my reproof:

26 I also will laugh at your
calamity; I will mock when your
fear cometh;

27 When your fear cometh as
desolation, and your destruction
cometh as a whirlwind; when
distress and anguish cometh upon
you.

28 Then shall they call upon me,
but I will not answer; they shall
seek me early, but they shall not
find me:

29 For that they hated knowledge,
and did not choose the fear of the
LORD:

30 They would none of my
counsel: they despised all my
reproof.

31 Therefore shall they eat of the
fruit of their own way, and be
filled with their own devices.

32 For the turning away of the
simple shall slay them, and the
prosperity of fools shall destroy
them.

33 But whoso hearkeneth unto me
shall dwell safely, and shall be
quiet from fear of evil.

We wish everyone would just respond to the light that is given and received, but not all do. It is not that all *should* take their time. It is not that it is even *better* if all take their time. Not everyone *has* time, death is just around every corner and it's by grace we are spared to have another day to decide for Christ. But, death *will* come.

I can't wait to get to the time when Jacob *does* respond. But in the mean time, the question for each of us is, "Is it time for me to respond to God?" If you ever see that question on a test, I can tell

you the answer should be "Yes."

1. Encountering God - Gen 12:6-8, 28:11-15, Deut 9:1-6, Eph 6:10-12, John 1:1-9, Ps 19:1-3, Rom 1:18-20, Acts 17:24-28, Isa 55:6-11, John 16:7-11,
2. Responding to God Luke 16:29-31, Gen 28:16-22, Acts 9:4-6, Matt 13:12, Prov 1:20-33