

## 14. Esau and Jacob - Genesis 25-28





Abraham is held up to the reader as a model, a flawed one who had a lot to learn, but one who reached a heroic degree of faith and obedience, such that we can look to him as our 'father in faith'(Romans 4:16). The story about Esau and Jacob is a story about God who is faithful to his promises and his blessing, brought about through the weak human beings that he has chosen.



This is a story of a family with plenty of family conflicts. It begins in conflict. Jacob and Esau are twins. Esau is the first one born, and so by convention is in a key position of power in the family as regards authority and inheritance. However, even in the womb there is a struggle and this struggle dominates the narrative. And there is much more to the struggle than this. The drama plays out because it is God who has ordained it to be this way, and we have no idea why. We are so used to claiming God for the way things are, for the positions of power that are set up by human convention (see Deuteronomy 21:15-17), that we ought to be scandalised by this story. It is about God who will not be bound by our conventions.



This is about God who is free, for whom ‘the first will be last, and the last first’ (Matthew 19:30). This is a story about God who chooses ‘what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are’ (1 Corinthians 1:28). This is a story about God who has a preferential option for the poor and who hears their cry. The authors of Deuteronomy remind Israel:

‘It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that YHWH set his heart on you and chose you – for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because YHWH loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that YHWH has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that YHWH your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty’ (Deuteronomy 7:7-9).



This is a story of God's blessing that, like the wind, 'blows where it wills' (John 3:8). Nor does the blessing mean an untroubled life. Jacob is always in conflict: with Esau throughout the narrative; with his uncle, Laban (29-31); with his wife Rachel (30:1-2); with his sons (34:30); and, most significantly of all, with God (32:22-29). The prophet Hosea sums up his life: 'In the womb he tried to supplant his brother, and in his manhood he strove with God' (Hosea 12:3). Yet, throughout his troubled life, Jacob encounters God, just as the people of Israel, throughout their troubled history, experienced the guiding hand of the God who has chosen them in love, for a mission to the world God loves. The authors of the narrative and their readers have lived through and were part of a history of human unfaithfulness. They have also experienced proofs of YHWH's faithfulness through it all. This is a major theme of these stories.



## 1. Birth of Esau and Jacob Genesis 25:21-23

‘Isaac prayed to YHWH for his wife Rebekah, because she was barren [like Sarah, 11:30]; and YHWH granted his prayer, and his wife conceived. The children struggled together within her; and she said, “If it is to be this way, why do I live?” So she went to inquire of YHWH.

And YHWH said to her:

Two nations are in your womb,  
the one shall be stronger than the other,  
and two peoples born of you shall be divided;  
the older shall the younger serve.’

The last line is ambiguous!



## Genesis 25:24-28

When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents.

Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.



## 2. Esau gives up his birthright Genesis 25:29-34

Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. Esau said to Jacob, “Let me shove some of that red stuff down my throat, for I am almost dying of hunger!” (Therefore he was called Edom.) Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.” Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?” Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.



### 3. Isaac at Gerar Genesis 26:1-5

‘Isaac went to Gerar, to King Abimelech of the Philistines. The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; settle in the land that I shall show you. Reside in this land as an alien, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfill the oath that I swore to your father Abraham [see 17:19]. I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and will give to your offspring all these lands; and all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring. because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”



## Genesis 26:6-11

Isaac copies Abraham by passing Rebekah off as his sister [see 12:10-20; 20:1-18]. God saves her from having intercourse.

## Genesis 26:12-23

Isaac moves around to secure wells

## Genesis 26:23-24

Isaac went up to Beer-sheba. YHWH appeared to him and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham; do not be afraid, for I am with you and will bless you and make your offspring numerous for my servant Abraham’s sake.”

## Genesis 26: 25-33

A pact between Abimelech and Isaac



#### 4. Jacob obtains Isaac's blessing Genesis 27:1-4

When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called his elder [and favourite, see 25:27-28] son Esau and said to him, "My son"; and he answered, "Here I am." He said, "See, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me. Then prepare for me savoury food, such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before I die."



## Genesis 27:5-10

Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, Rebekah said to her son (and favourite) Jacob, “I heard your father say to your brother Esau, ‘Bring me game, and prepare for me savory food to eat, that I may bless you before the LORD before I die.’ Now therefore, my son, obey my word as I command you. Go to the flock, and get me two choice kids, so that I may prepare from them savoury food for your father, such as he likes; and you shall take it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.”



## Genesis 27:11-25

Rebekah orders Jacob to cover himself to feel like Esau. Three times Isaac questions him, and three times Jacob persists in the deception.

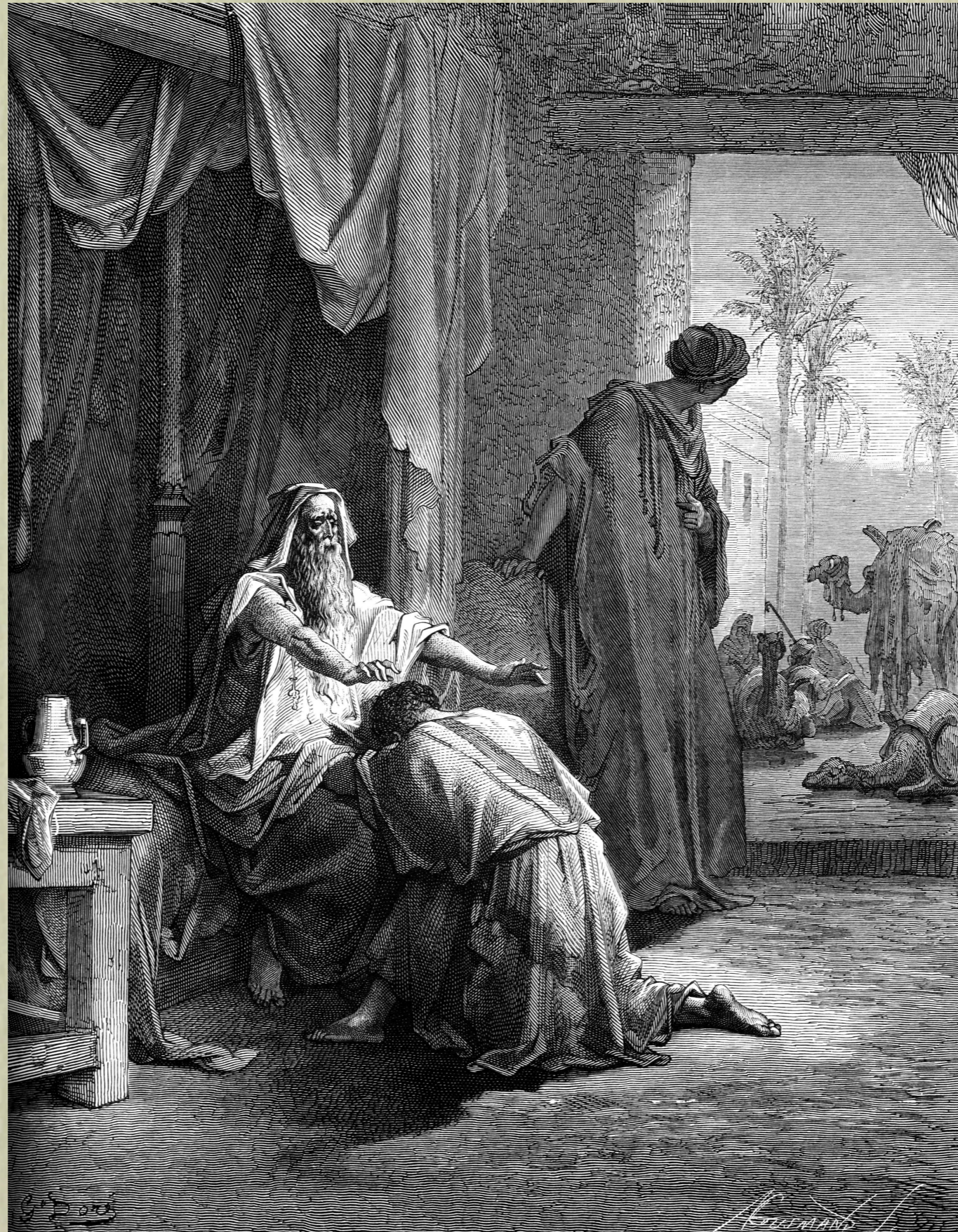
## Genesis 27:26-29

Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come near and kiss me, my son.” So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said, “Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that YHWH has blessed.

‘May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!’”

This blessing is meant for Esau, the firstborn.











## Genesis 27:30-33

As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of his father Isaac, his brother Esau came in from his hunting. He also prepared savoury food, and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, “Let my father sit up and eat of his son’s game, so that you may bless me.”

His father Isaac said to him, “Who are you?” He answered, “I am your firstborn son, Esau.” Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, “Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him? – yes, and blessed he shall be!”

The blessing once given cannot be revoked







## Genesis 27:34-38

When Esau heard his father's words, he cried out with an **exceedingly great and bitter cry**, and said to his father, "Bless me, me also, father!" But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing." Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright; and look, now he has taken away my blessing."

Then he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" Isaac answered Esau, "I have already made him your lord, and I have given him all his brothers as servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?" Esau said to his father, "Have you only one blessing, father? Bless me, me also, father!" And **Esau lifted up his voice and wept.**



## Genesis 27:39-41

Then his father Isaac answered him:

“See, away from the fatness of the earth shall your home be,  
and away from the dew of heaven on high.

By your sword you shall live,  
and you shall serve your brother;  
but when you break loose,  
you shall break his yoke from your neck.”

Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then **I will kill my brother Jacob.**”

- Our sympathy is with Isaac and Esau, not Rebekah and Jacob!



## Genesis 27:42-46

The words of her elder son Esau were told to Rebekah; so she sent and called her younger son Jacob and said to him, “Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran, and stay with him a while, until your brother’s fury turns away—until your brother’s anger against you turns away, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send, and bring you back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?”

Then Rebekah said to Isaac, “I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women [Esau’s wives, see 26:34-35]. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women such as these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?”



## 5. Isaac sends Jacob to Laban Genesis 28:1-5

Isaac sends Jacob off to Rebekah's brother Laban in Aram to find a wife from within the family.

He then gives him the blessing that was his due because of the covenant: a blessing, not of power and wealth, but of children and land. There was no need for deception. No need for Jacob to want to supplant his brother Esau.

*'May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and numerous, that you may become a company of peoples. May he give to you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your offspring with you, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien – land that God gave to Abraham'(28:3-4).*



## 6. Another marriage of Esau Genesis 28:5-9

Esau hears that Jacob has been sent off to find a wife

When Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please his father Isaac, Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath daughter of Abraham's son Ishmael, and sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had.



## 7. Jacob's Dream    Genesis 28:10-12

‘Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.’

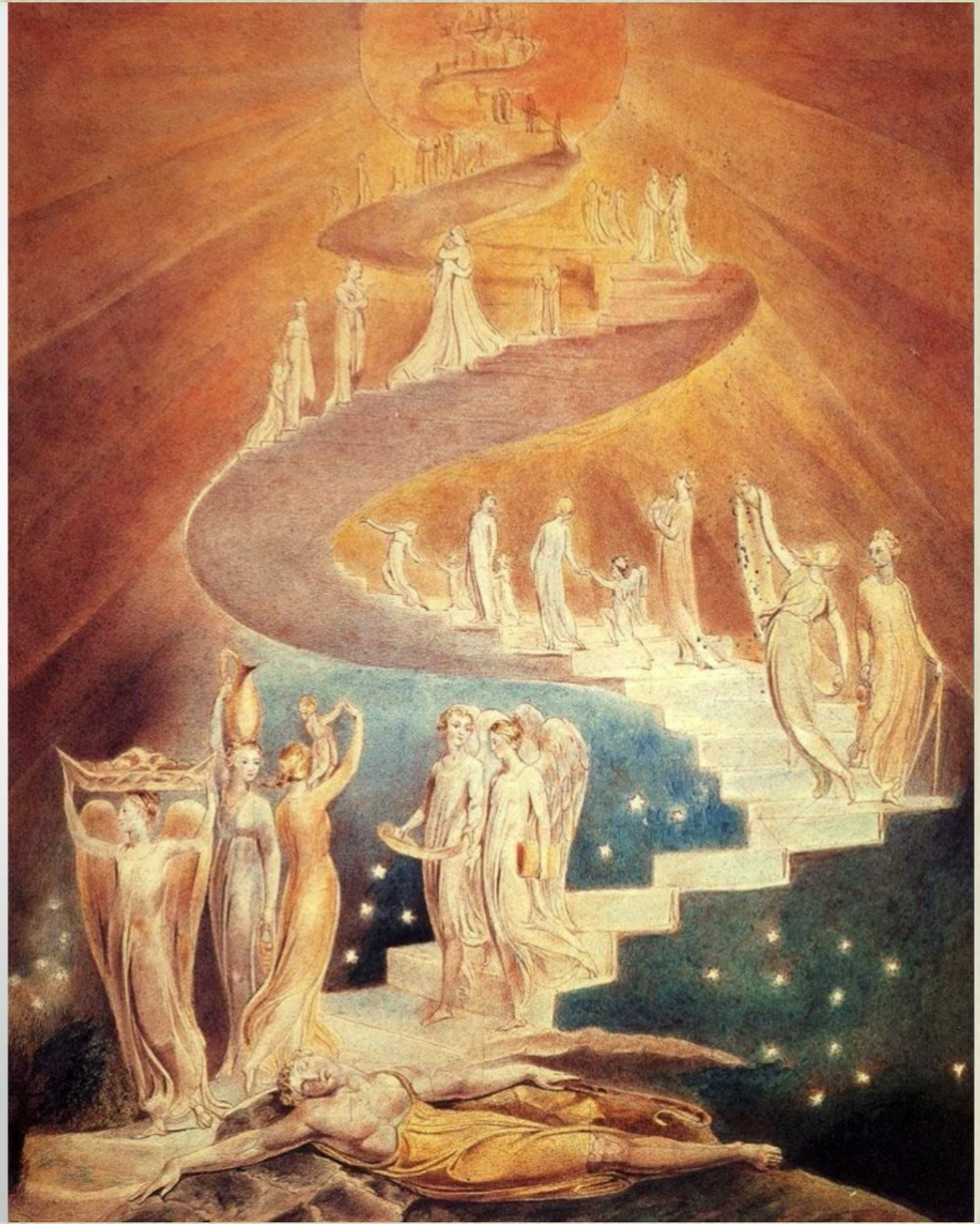


























## Genesis 28: 13-14

'YHWH stood beside him and said, "I am YHWH, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring.'

Jacob is given the same promise of land that was given to Abraham (12:7; 13:15) and to Isaac (26:3-4). He is given the same promise of a multitude of descendants that was given to Abraham (12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 22:17) and to Isaac (26:3-4). And he is given a promise, already given to Abraham (12:3; 18:18; 22:18) and to Isaac (26:4): 'all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring'.



## Genesis 28:15

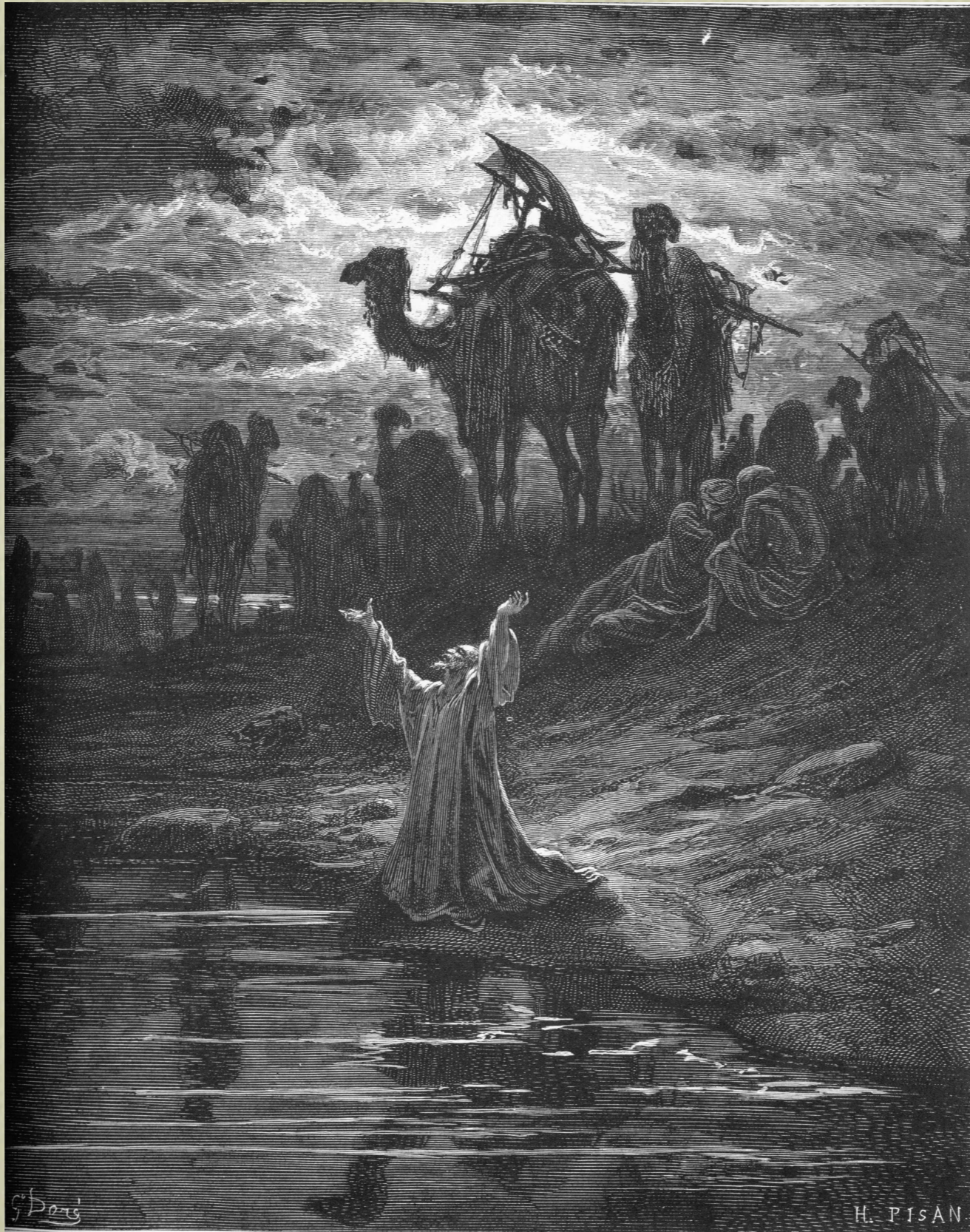
“Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

This promise is special for Jacob

## Genesis 28:16-17

Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely YHWH is in this place – and I did not know it!” And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

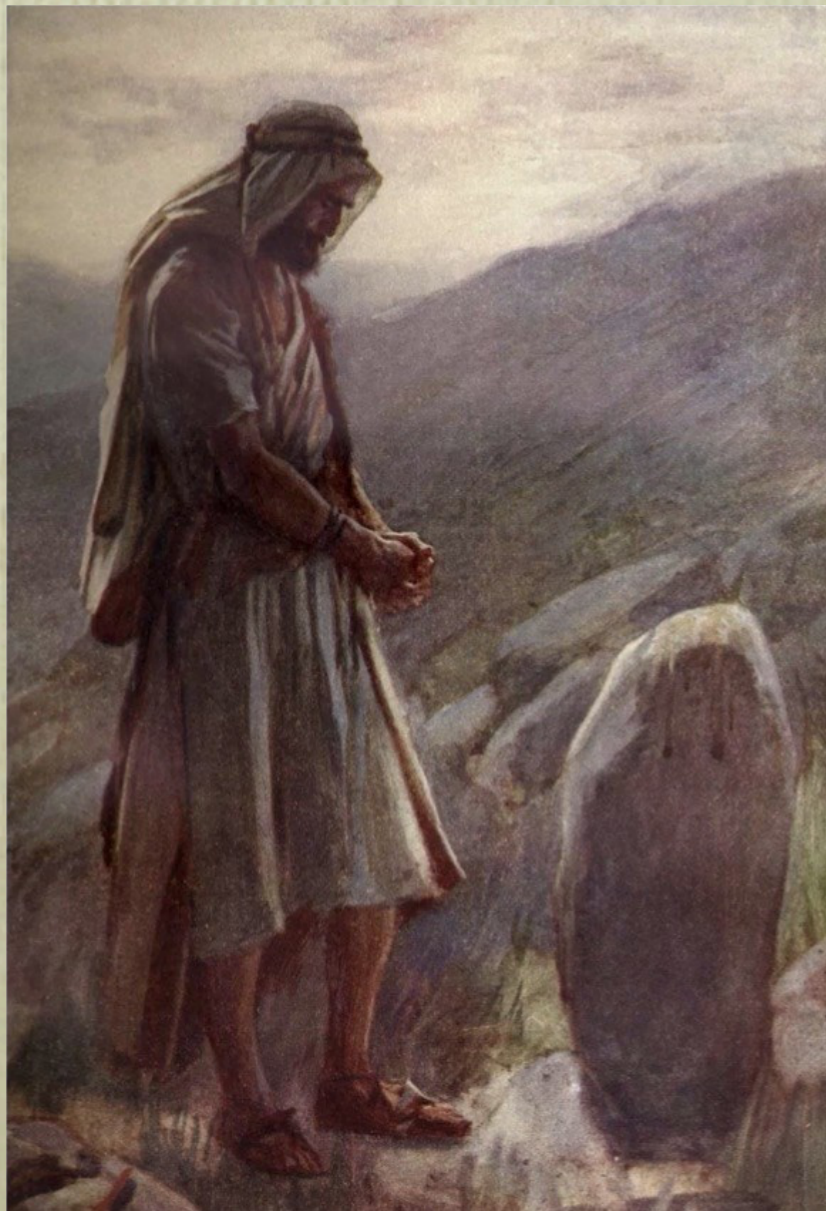






## Genesis 28:18-19

'So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz [almond tree] at the first.





## Genesis 28:20-22

Then Jacob made 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 clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then YHWH shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one tenth to you.”

Jacob commits himself and his descendants to worship only YHWH. He also sets up what was to become a temple (see Amos 7:13; 2Kings 23:15-20), thereby committing himself (and his descendants) to worship. He promises to give a tithe, thereby committing himself (and his descendants) to the recognition that the land belongs to YHWH, who has given it into Israel’s care.