

## He Was There All The Time Genesis 28:16 Jim Stephens

- **Title:** He Was There All The Time
- **Text:** *When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." (Genesis 28:16 NIV)*
- **Thesis:** God is always there, even when we aren't aware of his presence.

*When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." (Genesis 28:16 NIV)*

**Introduction:** If you've ever been caught in family conflict. If you are inclined to think there must be a God, but figure he (or she) probably isn't too concerned about what's going on in your life right now. If you'd like to believe your life has more purpose than groceries, gasoline, getting to work on time. If you feel like it's probably too late, too many bad choices. This story may be of interest to you.

### **The story: Genesis 28**

Jacob was on his way from Beersheba in the south of what later became the nation of Israel to Haran in modern day Turkey. He was on the run because he had cheated his older brother Esau and Esau had vowed to kill him as soon as their father, old Isaac was dead.

Jacob was from a very dysfunctional family. He and Esau were twins, but were as different as night and day. His Father Isaac loved moments-older redneck, outdoorsman Esau and Mother Rebekah loved sophisticated, business-headed Jacob. *Preferential treatment of one child over another is a recipe for family conflict.*

As the boys grew, their differences became more and more distinct. Esau was a good old boy who hunted and did more than a little playing around with the local girls and Jacob stayed close to home and learned the management of the family business.

God had told Rebekah before the twin boys were born that they would be different, that they would both be great leaders, and that the younger would be the one God would bless.

Jacob had heard many times from his mother what God had told her about himself and his brother Esau and he wasn't above taking matters into his own hands if he could see an advantage for himself. *This was a seriously dysfunctional family! And they were the ones through whom God was planning to bless the world.*

One day Jacob tricked tired and hungry Esau into selling him his older-brother birthright for some bean stew. *The birthright was important in this culture in two ways. The oldest son inherited twice as much of the father's wealth as any other sons and the oldest son was the one through whom the family line would be named – as in Abraham, Isaac, and Esau. The covenant God had made with Abraham would be passed on through the oldest son of the oldest son. So it would go to Esau. But Jacob wanted it, Esau didn't value it and so Jacob got it.*

Years passed and as Isaac became old and blind and expected to die soon, he called for Esau to go and kill an antelope and prepare him some wild-game stew and then Isaac would pass on the family blessing – a prophecy from the father about what God would do for the son.

Rebekah and Jacob conspired to trick blind Isaac by having Jacob take some food she prepared to Isaac before Esau could return with his prey. I'm not sure how the trick actually fooled Isaac, but it did and he prophesied – spoke words to and about Jacob that could not be taken back.

*"28 May God give you of heaven's dew and of earth's richness— an abundance of grain and new wine. 29 May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed."* (Genesis 27:28-29 NIV)

**Words spoken:** The words of blessing Isaac had spoken to Jacob meant much more than the birthright Jacob had already taken from Esau.

Words parents speak to kids are powerful – for good or bad, for blessing or cursing. Jamaica, Dad Miller, "Me glad you born."

Words can bless, inspire, encourage and words can hurt, demean, and demoralize. Kids will be shaped by the words parents speak to and about them (stupid/worthless/do it again, can't you do anything right?) Or even lack of words – never praising effort, not acknowledging progress, not expressing love. Some kids will be broken by those words and will become the demonstration of those words. Others will react and will fight bitterly to prove those words wrong. Either way, the words shape the person and their future. Marriage, friendships, the workplace – words are powerful.

Proverbs 11:9a *Evil words destroy one's friends.*

Proverbs 15:4 *Gentle words bring life and health; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.*

Proverbs 18:21b *The tongue can kill or nourish life..*

Even Esau – rowdy, redneck Esau – who probably never had a spiritual thought in his life valued the words of his Dad more than the double inheritance of the oldest son.

## **Jacob was a man on the run. (Genesis 28:5, 10) (Chair Bible Page )**

*5 Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way, and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, who was the mother of Jacob and Esau.  
10 Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. (Genesis 28:5, 10 NIV)*

- **Jacob was running from problems he had created. (Genesis 27:41)**

*Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob." (Genesis 27:41 NIV)*

- He wasn't entirely to blame for the problems of his past, other imperfect people shared part of the responsibility. His father, his mother, his brother Esau.
- But these were Jacob's problems and he had to deal with them.
- Because of his trickery and Esau's anger, Jacob had to let go of the birthright. All he had was the blessing. All he had was words from God – about him and for him.
- We're all on the run in some area of life! Avoiding, denying, staying too busy to face and deal with things.
- **All of us have problems that we're partly responsible for and that others are partly responsible for. The important thing is that we identify and accept responsibility for our part. That's the only part we can do something about. As long as we blame others, we'll always be victims! We can only become victors by facing and accepting our part of the responsibility.**

- **Jacob was headed for an uncertain future.**

- Jacob's past behavior made it impossible for him to go back home.
- Jacob hoped the future he would find in Haran would be better.
- Hopefully he would escape the death threat of his brother.
- Maybe in the household of Laban, his mother's older brother, things would be better.
- Anyhow, Jacob was heading north and about 50 miles from home – a couple of days' into his 500 mile journey, he stopped for the night at a place called Bethel.
- **Everyone is heading into an uncertain future. Like Jacob, the only thing we know for certain is what God has said about us.**

## **Jacob came to a certain place. (Genesis 28:11)**

*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. (Genesis 28:11 NIV)*

- There are “certain places” in life where important things are destined to happen. The “certain places” are not always pleasant places.
- When Jacob reached his “certain place” exhausted and alone, he chose a stone for a pillow.
- You’re in tough circumstances when the best you can do for a pillow is a rock. Reminds me of the saying “Between a rock and a hard place!” That’s where Jacob was.
- Sometimes God has to allow us to get to a “certain place” before we’re willing to listen to him or allow him to help us.

### **Jacob had an unexpected encounter with God. (Genesis 28:12-13)**

*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. (Genesis 28:12-13 NIV)*

- Jacob wasn’t looking for God but God knew just where he was.
- God set up an appointment with Jacob when he wasn’t expecting it. It was one of the toughest times in Jacob’s life.
- God purposed to meet Jacob at a certain place. Where Jacob was between a rock and a hard place. Where Jacob had reached the end of his own plans, ambitions, and schemes.
- God’s dream for Jacob was the same as Jacob’s dream for himself. The problem was that when Jacob tried to fulfill the dream (his dream, which was God’s dream only he didn’t know that yet) he lied, cheated, and created pain for everyone around him.
- God said to Jacob, “Let me do it. Let me bless you. Let me make you more than your schemes and self-effort can ever be achieve. Let me be your God.”
- God spoke the same words Isaac had twice spoken about his son Jacob – the blessing Jacob stole, the blessing Isaac gave when Jacob left.
- An encounter with God may be dramatic, “ordinary,” private or public, but an encounter with God is almost always unexpected.

### **Jacob learned that God is there all the time. (Genesis 28:16-17)**

*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." (Genesis 28:16-17 NIV)*

- One of the problems with being on the run is that you begin to feel all alone. No one knows and if they did they wouldn’t care anyhow.
- Even seems like God doesn’t know where you are and what you’re going through.

- The toughest place you've ever been can be the gate of heaven if you meet God there.
- You need to know today that God is there all the time. When you're on the run, when you're between a rock and a hard place, when it seems you're all alone, God is there all the time.
- Jacob marked the place at which he encountered God. (Genesis 28:18-19)

*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. (Genesis 28:18-19 NIV)*

We need to recognize important experiences and transitions in our lives and mark them.

### **Jacob made a personal response to God. (Genesis 28:20-22)**

*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." (Genesis 28:20-22 NIV)*

Jacob went away from his unexpected encounter with God changed – different. Before, everything we know about Jacob was Jacob-centered.

- I want the birthright.
- I want the blessing.
- I want the inheritance.
- I don't care who gets hurt in the process.

Jacob went away different. The God of my fathers – of Abraham, and Isaac – will be my God.

- This was Abraham's God and Isaac's God. Now Jacob makes the commitment that God will be Jacob's God and Jacob will be God's Jacob.
- Jacob went away from his encounter "God-Aware." He was there all the time. Now I know he's my God.

### **Close:**

### **Can you see yourself in the story of Jacob?**

- A past filled with problems you are partly responsible for creating.
- An uncertain future you hope will be better.
- Hoping God knows where you are, but not really sure.
- God has a dream for you – for your life. You need an encounter with God to clarify and affirm that. Don't give up on your dream.

## Perhaps today you are at a “certain place.”

- It may be you’re at the end of your rope.
- It may be you’re between a rock and a hard place.
- It may be you are just not sure if God really cares, if he is aware and willing to be involved in your life.

## Let this be your breakthrough moment.

- *“Surely God is in this place and I wasn’t aware of it.”*
- I want God to be my God.
- God can use you, in spite of your problems – even the ones you caused for yourself.
- Everything God says about you is true and good. God will remind you of his good plan if you’ll let him.
  - *How precious are your thoughts about me, O God! They are innumerable!* (Psalm 139:17 NLT)
  - *For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV)

It will require a response on your part. I am going to pray that you will encounter God in the ordinariness of life.

*If you will be with me and watch over me on this journey that I am taking, and if you will give me food to eat and clothes to wear, and if you will direct my steps so that I can fulfill the purpose for which I was born into this world, then you will be my God and I will trust my life into your hands and live my life as a stewardship to you.*

### **Bullpen Discussion Points:**

- What do you think of Jacob’s comment, *“Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it?”*
- Have you ever had an unexpected encounter with God that changed the way you see yourself, your purpose in life, your relationship with God?
- If God is truly “There all the time,” what do you think prevents us from being more aware of his presence?
- What can we do to cultivate a continual awareness of God in our lives?