

## Wednesday Study, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020

**Pray:** that the Holy Spirit will enlighten your mind and give you understanding as you study God's word. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to discern and hear any special message that God has for you this day.

### **Read Genesis 28.10-17.**

*10 Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. 11 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. 12 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. 13 And the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, 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; 14 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. 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." 16 Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place — and I did not know it!" 17 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." NRSV*

Following the urging of his mother, Jacob has left home and is on his way to Haran to live with his Uncle Laban. Ostensibly he is doing this to find a wife but in reality, it is to escape the wrath of his brother, Esau

who is threatening to harm Jacob for stealing their father's dying blessing.

After travelling about 89 kilometers, night was falling, and he stopped to sleep rough under the stars. In a vivid dream he saw a stairway from heaven to earth with angels going up and down.

1. What do you think may be the message conveyed by this stair way?

Jesus also made reference to this dream. **Read John 1:51** for more insight into its possible meaning.

Also re-read v.16 for part of what Jacob learned from the vision. God and heaven can be found even in ordinary places.

2. Can you recall a time when you found God, heaven, or Jesus present in an otherwise ordinary place?

Then in the dream, God stood beside Jacob and spoke to him. For Jacob, this was the most significant spiritual event of his youth.

Re-read vv.13-15

3. What do you think Jacob will have learned from God's spoken message? Make a list before reading on.

In vv.13-14, God reassures Jacob and affirms that he is Jacob's God and is to be especially blessed by God. This might surprise us, knowing that Jacob was fleeing his brother's wrath after having deceived his Father and stolen Esau, his elder brother's rightful blessing. And yet, it is to Jacob that God reaffirms the promise that he had made to Abraham (Genesis 22:17-18). The land will be inhabited by God's people, Jacob's descendants, who will be blessed to be a blessing to others.

In v.15, Jacob was reassured by God that he was not alone after all. God was with him to support and guide him and will care for Jacob wherever he goes.

God's statement would probably have surprised Jacob, for the gods of the pagans were only local deities who were limited in providing protection to their local territory. Jacob did not have the benefit of the Scriptures that we have.

Isaiah 45:15 says, "*Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go*".

Read also for example, **Jeremiah 23:23-24**.

*Am I a God near by, says the Lord, and not a God far off? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord. Jeremiah 23:23-24. NRSV*

God is everywhere! As he says in Jeremiah 23:24 he fills heaven and earth. This is expressed in the doctrine that we call 'divine omnipresence'. Jacob won't know this doctrine, but he discovers first-hand through personal experience this unique characteristic of his God, Yahweh.

4. How much of God's promise to Jacob in verses 13-15 is also his promise to you?

Even when we do not know it, God is with us and aware of all that we are thinking and doing - we cannot hide from God.

**Read Psalm 139:7-10**

*7 Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
9 If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
10 even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
NRSV*

5. Why do you think that God takes such an interest in you?

Verse 7b uses the word ‘flee’ - Sometimes we have a tendency to see God’s vigilance in watching our every thought and move as being like a disciplinarian waiting to chastise us for being disobedient, and we may wish to flee or escape from it. (Perhaps Jacob may have felt this way before God reassured him.)

6. Re-read v.10. What does this tell us about God’s vigilance over us when it says, *‘your hand shall lead me ... shall hold me fast.’*?

Even when we do not know it, God is with us and aware of all that we are thinking and doing – and we cannot discourage him from taking a loving interest in us.

The Bible assures us that God is ‘steadfast’ in his love and care of us. Did you know that the Old Testament uses the phrase ‘steadfast love’ when speaking about God, 173 times?

7. How does it make you feel to know that God has such ‘steadfast love for you?
8. Can you think of a time when you became acutely aware of God’s presence with you?

**Now read Verse 1-6 of Psalm 139**

*1 O Lord, you have searched me and known me.  
 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
 you discern my thoughts from far away.  
 3 You search out my path and my lying down,  
 and are acquainted with all my ways.  
 4 Even before a word is on my tongue,  
 O Lord, you know it completely.  
 5 You hem me in, behind and before,*

*and lay your hand upon me.*

*6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.*

NRSV

After almost 48 years of marriage, Linda and I know each other fairly well; yet there are still times when we realise that we don't know everything. Sometimes we may still be puzzled by a statement or a response, or be surprised by a previously unspoken desire.

9. Do you feel that anyone knows you as fully as indicated in the first five verses of Psalm 139?
10. How fully does God know you?
11. Read vv.2-4. Make a list of all that God knows about each person.



So, God knows us perfectly, or as expressed in verse 4b he knows us ‘completely’. He not only knows what we are about to say before it is said, but he also knows the motives (and perhaps pain) behind it.

Can you comprehend God’s understanding of you? Certainly, the Psalmist cannot! He writes in verse 6, ‘*Such knowledge (of God’s comprehension of us) is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.*’ God knows us fully, but we cannot fully know God.

12. Why can we not fully comprehend God?

13. Will we ever know God fully?

Read what Paul says in 1 Cor 13:12-13, *‘For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.* NRSV

14. Which is more important — to know God well, or to be known well by God?

But, do you really want to be known by God to the degree that the Psalmist, David, talks about in this psalm?

**Read Psalm 139:11-12, 23-24**

*11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light around me become night,"*

*12 even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.*

*23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my thoughts.*

*24 See if there is any wicked way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

NRSV

The prayer in vv.23-24 that God would search my heart and reveal anything that is wicked and needs to be put right with him is a prayer that impressed itself upon me from my very early Christian walk. It is a very scary thought! We all have things in our heart that we would wish to be visible to everyone else – perhaps a cutting thought, a judgement of someone, a prejudice, guilt, embarrassment ...

15. How willing are you to be tried and tested by God?

16. What do these verses say about the Psalmist's trust in God?

17. The Psalmist must feel safe with God. Do you feel safe with God? Why have you answered as you have?

18. What is the follow on from God revealing something that needs attention? Re-read v24b.
19. How might we practice the awareness of God's presence so that we can better allow God to guide us?

***Pray:*** Loving steadfast God, thank you for never leaving me or letting go of me. Help me to know that I am never truly alone. Help me to sense your guiding hand in all circumstances. Help me to trust you enough to be willing to allow you to search my heart. And enable me to willingly follow as you lead me.

**An answer to Question 10:**

God knows my action (v.2a), undertaking (v.3a), manner in which I pursue it (v.3b), my thoughts – even before they are fully formed in my mind (v.2b), words – even before they are spoken (v.4)