

April 15 th	Genesis 28	51 God of hosts, you chose a vine
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Today's hymn is the metrical version of Psalm 80

The image of Israel as a vine is also used by the prophets, especially Isaiah ch.5. And Jesus talks about himself being the 'True Vine', and we are the branches.

This Psalm starts with a description of how fruitful and luxurious this vine of God is, but then goes on to describe it being ravaged by its enemies, perhaps a reference to the Exile. It ends with a prayer, a plea for help from God's grace and mercy to God's 'son' Israel (compare Hosea 11:1), but with a hint of that other 'Son of Man' still to come.

1 God of hosts, you chose a vine
meant to bear the finest wine,
set it in a promised land,
nurtured by your careful hand:

2 Like a cedar, it grew strong
deep its roots, its tendrils long;
yet, in envy those around
stripped its branches to the ground.

3 Desolate, to God we cry:
'Spare us from the enemy!'
God of hosts, turn back again,
all such wickedness restrain:

4 Turn us too, for we have failed,
faithfulness has not prevailed;
visit, Lord, and heal your vine,
on its fruit let glory shine!

Here it is to the tune *St Bees*:

<https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/hymn/51-god-of-hosts-you-chose-a-vine>

Today's reading is Genesis 28

So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him. Then he commanded him: "Do not marry a Canaanite woman. Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham." 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.

Now Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to Paddan Aram to take a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he commanded him, "Do not marry a Canaanite woman," and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Paddan Aram. Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; so he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, in addition to the wives he already had.

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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."

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." 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."

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. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

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 so that I return safely to my father's household, then the Lord will be my God 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."

'Jacob's ladder' - even the name conjures up all sorts of pictures. And it's also been used to describe many a steep or twisting path, including the one at the end of North Berwick's east bay!

Bethel is mentioned more times in the Old Testament than anywhere else except Jerusalem, and it already had a sacred history - one of the first places Abram had stopped and built an altar to worship God, when he first came into

the land of Canaan. But here, it is a place of revelation, of strengthening, and of grace. God repeats the covenant promises previously made to Jacob's father Isaac, and his grandfather Abraham. Their promises were now his promises - of land, of descendants, and of blessing. In a reference to Jacob's ladder, Jesus said to Nathanael in John 1:51: *'you will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man'*, meaning that Jesus himself would be the gateway to heaven. The rock group Led Zeppelin sang about a 'stairway to heaven'; Jesus says that he himself is that stairway, both for a 'twister' like Jacob, or a guile-less Nathanael. That is pure grace. One of my favourite hymns is the Scottish Paraphrase of this passage, *'O God of Bethel'*. For the nomadic people of God as Jacob and Esau were, and for the pilgrim people of God as we are, it says it all:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQn3-ZxeKjU>

Prayer This prayer was shared by a fellow Minister:
Vulnerable God,

In the midst of this Covid19 pandemic we ask You to draw close to us in our vulnerability. Like Your early followers we have seen the glory of the resurrection on Easter Day but still we wait, fearful for ourselves and our loved ones. But as they were released at Pentecost so we pray that for us there will be a Pentecost moment when we are finally released from lockdown. Father, lay Your mighty healing hand on the sick, stay with the dying and comfort the bereaved.

We give thanks for Your Church of Scotland and for the numbers listening to services at home. We pray for the day when churches will be re-opened and we can worship together as Your family again. But maybe there are lessons

to be learnt and we pray that they will be learnt. Be with those currently furloughed and keep them strong in their faith in You.

Loving Father You are our hope, our strength and our shield. You are Miracle Worker, our Promise Keeper and our Light in the Darkness.

Loving and Healing God draw close to us all in this pandemic crisis and let us feel your healing loving and gracious presence. Amen

A prayer from the Moderator for the coronavirus

emergency: <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/2020/a-prayer-from-the-moderator-amid-the-coronavirus-outbreak>