



Genesis 28:10-22

Jacob's Ladder

When I think of the patriarch Jacob, I think of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Jacob was a deceiver. His many-sided personality was filled with guile, meanness, craftiness and deceit. He's probably not the person you would like to have as your best friend or son-in-law.

In fact, when we meet up with him he is fleeing because he and his mother have deceived his father, Isaac, into giving him a spiritual blessing that had been destined to his older brother Esau. His own wrongdoing had driven him out of the home. When his father sent him away to Paddan-arm to seek a wife, he met his match in uncle Laban. They served deceit and guile up to one another for fourteen years.

It is on this long journey that Jacob, weary from the travel, spends the night in the open. He found a stone to "put under his head, and lay down in that place" (Genesis 28:11). It isn't strange to lay the head on a pillow of rock, or a board, or a book, or a straw mat, etc. I've done it many times in my travels as a missionary. Hard heads and hard rocks probably fit together.

Here is a man who is alone with God.

Weary and exhausted from the hard day of walking Jacob went into a deep sleep and began to dream. His dream was profound. He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it" (28:12).

"And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, 'I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants'" (v. 13).

The LORD God (*Yahweh*) got Jacob's attention at Bethel. He demonstrated that He cared about Jacob and his miserable condition.

God repeated the promise given to Abraham and Isaac

In that dream God rehearsed to Jacob the great promises He had given to his grandfather, Abraham and his father Isaac. It is obvious he will find his mate because his descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth" (v. 14).

Moreover, "if you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Yes, you read it correctly. God will bless and use a descendent of this deceiver for His eternal purpose. Remember, *Yahweh* is the God of

of this deceiver for His eternal purpose. Remember, *Yahweh* is the God of grace. He will continue to pursue Jacob and work in him until He has Jacob to the place where he can bring glory to the His name alone.

The Presence of God

The LORD makes another promise to Jacob. Behold, 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" (v. 15).

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.' 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'" (vv. 16-17). He got up poured oil on the stone and named the place Bethel, the house of God."

In a later event (Genesis 32:22ff) Jacob wrestled with the angel of the LORD and prevailed against him. Jacob clung to him and said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (v. 26). God changed his name from Jacob to "Israel, for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." Israel means He who strives with God or God strives." Much to his surprise, Jacob realized with whom he had wrestled and declared, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved" (v. 30). He went away limping for the rest of his life.

When God changes the name of a person in the Old Testament it often indicates a new relationship with that person. Jacob's life would never be the same after this encounter with God.

Jacob learned that when you are walking with the Lord any place becomes your resting place. Wherever you are *Yahweh* is there. Jacob just happened to be at Luz. Before He ascended into heaven Jesus told His followers, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). We have His abiding presence regardless of where we are. We are always with Him because He is the ladder into the presence of God. There is no place in this universe where our Lord is not with us. He is our dwelling place.

Moreover, there isn't anything that can separate us from our Lord. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

Jesus and Nathanael

This event in Jacob's life takes on special importance because Jesus appropriated it for Himself while talking to Nathanael.

How do men get to heaven? Jesus used this vision of Jacob in His conversation with a Jewish man named Nathanael. Jesus had never met this man before. He saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him,

Nathanael. Jesus had never met this man before. He saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!" (John 1:47). The word Jesus used for "guile" means to "catch with bait, beguile, deceit." He is not going to be like Jacob and make use of double dealings of deceit.

Jesus declared Nathanael to be a true son of Abraham, a Jew inwardly in spirit.

This took Nathanael completely by surprise. Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

What was he doing under the fig tree? Wouldn't we love to know? He was under the cover of the fig tree. No one knew he was there. No one saw him but God! Whatever it was Jesus saw him, and Nathanael was now conscious of His supernatural knowledge of that fact. This is a specific instance of Jesus' ability to know all things.

It can be inferred from verses 48, 51 that Nathanael was meditating on Jacob's life, particularly the incident recorded in Genesis 28:12. Jesus is the divine communication from heaven to earth. The Son of Man, replacing the ladder, is God's link with the earth (Dan. 7:13; Matt. 26:64). Jesus is the new "Bethel." He is God's dwelling place (Gen. 28:17; John 1:14). Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). He is the only door of entrance into the presence of God (John 10:1, 7).

Perhaps this is the passage of Scripture Nathanael was reading while sitting under the fig tree at home. There is also good reason to think he was praying, seeking God's forgiveness, and deliverance from his own deceit. Perhaps he was confessing his sins, and when he met Jesus there rang out in his ears the same response he had received in private with God! No one could have known that he had been alone seeking God's presence under that fig tree. But it was known to Jesus! This is God speaking. He alone knows what is happening in a person's heart. He is the only one who can lead us to heaven. He is the doorkeeper. He is the ladder to heaven.

Perhaps as he sat under the fig-tree he prayed for the day when God's Chosen One, the Messiah, would come. No doubt he had been meditating on the promises of God and now he felt that Jesus had seen into the very depths of his sinful heart. Holy penetrating presence of Jesus searches the depths of our being. He is the one person who understands our aspirations, hopes, ambitions, visions, etc. He knows the intents of our hearts, our secret longings, and the depths of our motives.

The Messiah

Suddenly, Nathanael responds, "R'abbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel" (John 1:49).

Nathanael represents the Israelite whose heart was cleansed of pride and prejudice and saw in Jesus the one who satisfied the longing of his waiting, seeking heart. The Savior, Redeemer, Messiah had come! Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the King of Israel (John 20:31). If we are true Israelites indeed, our hearts will crown Him as the "King of Israel." It should be noted that "King of Israel," "Son of Man," and "Son of God" are definitely Messianic titles (2 Samuel 7:14; Ps. 2:7; Juan. 12:13).

"Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (vv. 50-51). Jesus can do more than read the heart. He opens the door to heaven. Jesus was in unending and unbroken communion with the Father. Nathanael and the

the door to heaven. Jesus was in unending and unbroken communion with the Father. Nathanael and the other disciples saw the glory of God come down to man (John 1:14, 18). God and man met in Jesus Christ.

Verse 51 is an allusion or quotation of Genesis 28:12, and Jacob's ladder is replaced in the verse by "the Son of Man." The title "Søn of Man" in John's Gospel has the basic understanding of His origin in heaven (6:27, 33), that He will return again to His place of glory (6:62) by way of the cross (3:14; 8:28; 12:23, 34; 13:31). The divine origin and authority of Jesus is suggested by the title "Søn of Man." It was the Messianic title that Jesus chose for Himself.

A. T. Robertson says, "that was a dream to Jacob, but Christ is Himself the bond of fellowship between heaven and earth, between God and man, for Jesus is both 'the Son of God' as Nathanael said and 'the Son of Man' as Jesus here calls Himself. God and man met in Christ. He is the true Jacob's ladder. 'I am the Way,' Jesus will say."

The Incarnation made it an abiding reality. B. F. Westcott says, "That representative of Israel was a fact for the Son of Man. Thus the reference is to the continuing presence of Christ (Matt. 28:20), in whom believers realize the established fellowship of the seen and unseen, and not the special acts of angelic ministration to Christ alone during His earthly life."

The Door to Heaven is Open

The words "heavens opened" is the idea of remaining open or "standing open." Something has occurred in the past and it continues into the future. Heaven stands wide open and now the grace of God is available for every person who believes in the Son of Man. You can come into God's presence. He has forgiven you. The one standing there talking to Nathanael is the "door." He has bridged the gap between heaven and earth. He provides a means for us to enter into God's presence. Sin shut the door. However, Christ has removed the sin bearer that separates us through His death and resurrection. He is the only entrance into heaven because He is "the lamb slain from the before the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8; cf. Rev. 4:1; 19:11).

Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man. He is the only means whereby sinful man can have a right relationship with God. It is accomplished only by His crucifixion. Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me" (John 8:28). God opened heaven wide open by means of the cross of Jesus. That is why the apostle Peter could declare, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

In both of these passages the main thought is divine communication between heaven and earth. In Jesus Christ we have the continuing presence of God and He says to you and me, "I will never leave you, and I will never forsake you."

There is no ladder as Jesus uses the story because He is the ladder. The angels in their movement show the divine activity and identify Jesus with the ladder. Jesus is the link between heaven and earth. Jesus told Nicodemus, "No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man" (John 3:13). Jesus communicates the realities of heaven to men on this earth. If you want communion with heaven here is the only person who can do it for you. He is the only mediator between God and sinful man (1 Tim. 2:5).

Some scholars see the interpretation of the ladder reaching from heaven to earth in verse 51 as figurative, and some literal. Some see it fulfilled when our Lord was upon the earth in that Nathanael would see a fuller revelation of Christ. Others see it literally fulfilled in the resurrection and ascension of Christ. J. C. Ryle

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revelation of Christ. Others see it literally fulfilled in the resurrection and ascension of Christ. J. C. Ryle writes, "Our Lord spoke of His second coming and kingdom. When He comes the second time to take His great power and reign, the words of this text shall be literally fulfilled. His believing people shall see heaven open, and a constant communication kept up between heaven and earth,--the tabernacle of God with men, and the angels visibly ministering to the King of Israel, and King of all the earth."

Jesus told Caiaphas that he will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with clouds of heaven (Mk. 14:62).

Nathanael saw the great reality of something modern men need to see, too. Yes, Jesus is Israel's true Messiah. He is Israel's long expected King after the heart of David. Jesus will one day come and reign over Israel from Jerusalem just like the Hebrew prophets foretold (Isa. 24:23; Zech. 14:9, 16).

Moreover, there is also the picture of judgment upon the Gentiles. The future judgment of Christ as the Son of man will come on the self-righteous (Daniel 7:13-14; Matt. 13:41-43; 16:27; 24:27, 30; 25:31-46; 26:64). Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. Those who have rejected Him will meet Him as their judge. It is my prayer as I write these words that you know Him as the Lamb of God who has taken away all your sins (John 1:29; 1 John 1:6). Jesus Christ is Messiah, King, Son of God, and Son of Man, and He is coming again. Are you ready? (Rev. 19:11-16)

It is interesting to observe that there was tremendous angelic activity when Jesus rose from the dead (cf. Matthew 28:5; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4; John 20:12; Acts 1:11). Jacob's ladder pointed to Jesus Christ who said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). Only Jesus Christ can make that statement because He is the Son of God.

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