

Ladder of Grace 9-9-07

Genesis 27:41-28:22

The deed was done. Rebekah and Jacob conspired together to deceive Isaac, and they succeeded. The blessing was stolen. The family was torn apart. Esau was seething! Twice robbed, Esau's only comfort was dreaming of the day he would pierce Jacob's heart like the animals he hunted. The author of Hebrews warns us not to give in to bitterness like Esau. When something so fills your thoughts, so captures your imagination, you cannot help but talk about it. It spills out like puss from an infected sore. (Hebrews 12:15)

Commented [notes1]: 15 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

Rebekah seemed to hear almost everything that went on. The word reached her of Esau's intentions. It shouldn't be surprising that he decided on murder as a solution. If there is a surprise, it is that he now valued the blessing so highly. Perhaps it wasn't so much that he valued it, as that it was another point of contention between his brother and him.

Rebekah went to work doing what she does best, manipulation. She and Isaac disagreed about many things, but one thing they had in common is their hatred of Esau's Hittite wives. In chapter 26 we read, ³⁴ *When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite.* ³⁵ *They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah.*

Rebekah planted a thought in Isaac's mind. ⁴⁶ *Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I'm disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living."* What if Jacob married a Hittite? Now, I don't know what these women were like, but they must have had customs that really irritated Isaac and Rebekah. The Hittites had numerous gods, gods of rain, thunder, rivers, mountains etc. It could have been all the idolatry or just the differing habits. Whatever the case, the suggestion caused Isaac to remember what he had done earlier, find a wife among the descendents of Nahor, Rebekah's family. (Genesis 24:3,4)

Commented [notes2]: 3 I want you to swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living, 4 but will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac."

Isaac reacted just as Rebekah had calculated. He decided to send Isaac to Padan Aram to find a wife. Rebekah didn't have to bring up the rivalry issue, or reveal Esau's plot. She just made a comment that she knew would end in what she had in mind in the first place. Isaac surely thought he had a stroke of genius. Rebekah thought she was the great coordinator of events. Unlike Isaac, she has not seen that God is having His way even when people try to defy Him. Again, she could not trust God to fulfill His word without her help.

Her scheme was to call Jacob back when Esau's hatred subsided. ⁴⁵ *When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I'll send word for you to come back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?"* Man plans his ways, but God directs his steps. (Proverbs 16:9) She would be dead before that day would come.

Commented [notes3]: 9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.

Isaac had truly had a change of heart after his encounter with the sovereignty of God. When he realized what had happened he trembled violently. He was facing the reality of how God's word came to pass in spite of everything he could do to thwart it. (Proverbs 19:21) He had to face how rebellious toward God's will he had become. He must have truly repented, for as He sent Jacob off, he wholeheartedly pronounced the covenant promises over Jacob. The wording tells us in no uncertain terms that Jacob is now the third patriarch.

Commented [notes4]: 21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

³ *May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples.* This takes us back to the promises to Abraham, when God promised his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. (Genesis 15:5) It is a wonderful turn around that Isaac was able to make by the grace of God. He has turned from his rebellious attitude and now is wholeheartedly cooperating with the will of God. When God confronts us, we can continue in sin, or do the right thing. But we can also do the right thing with a reluctant heart and miss out on the blessing of walking with the Lord. (2Chronicles 25:2) By the grace of God, Isaac was able to throw his heart and soul in the direction he once resisted.

Commented [notes5]: 5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

Commented [notes6]: 2 He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, but not wholeheartedly.

⁴ *May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham.*" He specifically states that Jacob is to be the heir of the blessings given to Abraham, including the land. It must have been a real encouragement to Jacob as he set out on his long journey. He had probably expected his father to be angry with him for the deception, but instead he went out with His father's blessing and the certainty that he was the heir of the promises. Unlike the same journey Abraham's servant took, Jacob went without provision for a bride price. (Genesis 24:10)

Commented [notes7]: 10 Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and left, taking with him all kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Aram Naharaim and made his way to the town of Nahor.

We can't read this passage without being reminded that we are the heirs of the promises to Abraham. Galatians 3:²⁹ *If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.* It is Abraham's children of faith in Christ Jesus that are numerous as the stars and possessors of the Kingdom. Our long journey will end in a marriage too, the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Esau had an interesting reaction. When he discovered that his brother had gone to get a wife that pleased his parents, he decided he'd try to do the same, so he took an Ishmaelite wife. They were related and not of a completely foreign culture like the Hittites, but you can't help wondering if he only made matters worse. Ishmael was the son that Abraham sent away at God's command. (Genesis 21:12) Now Esau is bringing one of his descendants back into the Promised Land. I get the feeling that Esau wasn't a real perceptive fellow.

Commented [notes8]: 12 But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."

Jacob left on an encouraging note, knowing he was the heir of the promises, but he also left in haste because of the fear of Esau. I imagine him looking over his shoulder at every sound to see if it wasn't Esau stalking him like wild game. If not Esau, robbers or wild animals might be on his trail. He didn't have an entourage like Abraham's servant. He was on his own and entering a strange land. He probably wondered if he would survive the journey and see his parents again.

Near the little town of Luz, Jacob stopped to sleep for the night, using a rock for a pillow. You'd think that would give you bad dreams, but instead he had an exceptionally good dream. 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...* Was it a ziggurat style stairway, or stairs like we would imagine, or ladder like? It wasn't men that were going up and down those stairs, but ministering angels going from heaven to earth and back. Above it all stood the LORD! The Hebrew words could mean that the LORD was at the top or standing beside Jacob. This was his first encounter with a theophany. He had surely heard the stories of such encounters from his father and grandfather, but now he was experiencing it for himself.

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. The LORD introduced Himself as the God of Abraham and Isaac. When we consider all our failures, it is so gracious of God to call Himself our God. He confirmed the word of Isaac; Jacob was indeed to inherit the land.

¹⁴ *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.* The LORD also confirmed that Jacob was the heir of the promise of being a great nation. (Genesis 13:16) He promised the earth would be blessed through him. Notice that he is now the designated one to carry the line of the seed, "through... your offspring." That was first spoken to Abraham (Genesis 22:18) and then to Isaac (Genesis 26:4) and now to Jacob. The word is literally "seed" and takes us back to the promise of Genesis 3:15, that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. Now we know for sure that Messiah will be a descendent of Jacob.

But now listen to the gracious promise of God to Jacob. Remember, Jacob is not seeking the LORD. He is running from the situation he caused. Nevertheless, God promised, ¹⁵ *"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."* There is the gracious word that his father had heard, "I am with you." The LORD promised to watch over him wherever he went and to bring him back safely. What a comfort that must have been! He doesn't have to keep looking over his shoulder. God promised He would not leave him.

Christian brother and sister, I hope you know He has promised us the same thing. He has said that He is with us and that He will never leave us. (John 14:23; Isaiah 41:10) You don't have to look over your shoulder either. You don't have to live in fear that someone will catch up with you, or calamity will overtake you. God is with you. He is watching over you. What He allows will be for your good. The comfort that Jacob felt on that lonesome journey should be ours as well, for the same word is spoken to us in the Gospels. (John 14:18)

It reminds me of the Chinese convert named Lo. He only had a King James Bible, but he was thrilled to find that the word of God can speak directly to you. When asked

Commented [notes9]: 16 I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.

Commented [notes10]: 18 and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Commented [notes11]: 4 I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed,

Commented [notes12]: 15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Commented [notes13]: 23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Commented [notes14]: 10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Commented [notes15]: 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

about his favorite verse, he never hesitated to point to Matthew 28:20 "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." That is a little humor, but you and I can put our name in there. Hear Jesus say it to you.

What a vision! What a comfort! If I were to speak to Jacob, I would have reproached him for not respecting his father. I'd have asked him why He didn't trust God to bring about the promise. But we don't even have a hint of reproach, just promises and comfort. This is a very gracious encounter.

¹⁶ When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." I think Jacob missed the point. It wasn't about the place. He will call the place the House of God, Bethel. It wasn't a sacred piece of earth. It was God's declaration that God was with Jacob, not a geographical location. (Acts 7:48) God promised to be with a being created in His image, through grace and mercy and love. That is the same promise we have.

Sometimes when we are facing the consequences of our sin, we don't feel that God is present. We aren't aware of His Presence just as Jacob wasn't aware when he laid his head down. But that is when He is nearest, because it is when we need Him most and are most open to Him. If you think about it, you've probably said something similar, "The LORD is in this place and I was not aware of it." He is there in funerals, accidents, stress of everyday life, and trials of every kind. (Isaiah 65:1)

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." Why was He afraid? God hadn't threatened to punish him in any way. He hadn't rebuked him. I believe that when we encounter God in a revelation as real as this, we are painfully aware of our sin and of His holiness. (Isaiah 6:5) We are conscious of the need for justice. Thank God that justice was met on the cross. (Colossians 2:14)

Jacob didn't realize that the ladder came down upon his life, not a piece of land. The angels were ministering to him. (Hebrews 1:14) The house and the gate and the ladder are going with him to Padan Aram. The house is the place of God's presence. (1Kings 8:11) The gate is the entrance from this world to the next. Jesus said that He is the gate. (John 10:7) And in John 1:51, Jesus declared that He is the ladder. ⁵¹ He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." He is our connection from this world to the next, our mediator. (1Timothy 2:5) He is the presence of God with us. (Matthew 1:23) Wherever Jacob went on his wanderings, the house, the gate, and the ladder went with him. And wherever we go, fellow believer, we have the presence, the gate, and the ladder with us. He will not leave us. He has plans on our life and His angels minister to us that are heirs of salvation.

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. This was an act of worship. The stone was a memorial of his encounter with God and the promise he had received. The oil over the top was an offering to God. It demonstrated his devotion and the importance he

Commented [notes16]: 48 "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says:

Commented [notes17]: 1 "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.'

Commented [notes18]: 5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

Commented [notes19]: 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

Commented [notes20]: 14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

Commented [notes21]: 11 And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple.

Commented [notes22]: Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.

Commented [notes23]: 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

Commented [notes24]: 23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

placed on the encounter. He was consecrating the place to God. If God had given it to him, He would give it back to God as the holy place where he met God.

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 God²² 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." His response to the encounter was to make a vow to God. It is important for us to see that the passage has two equally valid translations. One is an "if" and "then". If you do this for me, then I will respond in this way. The other translation is a "since You have" and "then I will". The difference is enormous. (see NIV notes)

The "if you will" "then I will" is Jacob's character up to this point. In other words, "OK, God. If you do what you are saying, then I'll accept you as my God and give you a tenth of all my earnings." It is the way most people relate to God before their heart is transformed. It is creating an idea of a god that is there to serve your whims. If he performs in a way that is satisfactory to you, then you will honor him. If life is good and you get what you want, then you will say a prayer and give an offering.

The "since... then" is what I think is the more likely scenario. Remember, he has just woken from an encounter with El Shaddai! He is fearful! He had this amazing dream of the stairway and angels. He isn't coming from a position of strength to make a deal with God. I think he is so overwhelmed, comforted, encouraged and all the while fearful, that he is saying, "Since you promised to do this... then I promise to respond as I should." Young's Literal Translation takes that interpretation. This is the response of person who realizes they are indebted to God. They have seen how incredibly gracious God is, and they want to respond as they should out of gratitude.

Let's apply that to our own life. If you've trusted in Jesus as your Savior, you have had an encounter with God like Jacob had. God promised to be with you and bless you and bring you safely home to heaven. Has He blessed you with clothes and food? What will you do about it? What is an appropriate response to all God has done and is doing for you? His grace has saved us. Like Jacob, we were running from the consequences of our sin when He graciously intervened in our lives. Jacob promised to worship by remembering the place of the encounter. Is the day of your salvation fresh in your memory? Is your commitment to Him as real and as strong as the day you first made it?

Jacob promised to tithe, to give back to God, knowing all he had was a gift from God's grace. He responded to God's abundant mercy, with a vow to be faithful to give back to God a portion of what he'd been given. How have you responded to the house, the gate and the ladder that are ever with you? Even as I speak, the angels are ascending and descending upon you because Jesus, the ladder is upon you. He is in this place. Do you know it? Will you walk away unchanged, or will you make a vow to God this morning?