



## TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

### Talk Genesis 28:10-22: Jacob's Dream of the Ladder Between Heaven and Earth

---

#### Lesson 65

*"Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11 So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. 12 Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.*

*13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. 14 Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. 15 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 spoken to you."*

*16 Then Jacob awoke 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!"*

*18 Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. 19 And he called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of that city had been Luz previously. 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, 21 so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. 22 And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."*

#### Background Notes

We have all heard and probably sung the song, "We are climbing Jacob's ladder." However, that is not the meaning of the dream, as we'll see in our doctrinal points. There is **no** idea in this dream of Jacob (or anyone else) climbing the ladder to heaven! Don't build your theology on hymns or Christian songs, but from the Bible!

After Jacob left Beersheba, he traveled about 50 or 60 miles north on his way to Haran, and decided to spend the night at a place called Luz. Did Jacob realize that this was a place where Abraham had stopped when he came into the land (Genesis 12)? Here the Lord had appeared to Abraham, here Abraham had built an altar unto the Lord, and here Abraham worshiped the Lord.

The ladder that Jacob saw in his dream was probably not a ladder with rungs, but rather a wide staircase with hosts of angels going up and down between earth and heaven.

Early in the morning after the dream, Jacob set up the stone he had used as a pillow as a monument. In those days, people would set up stones as monuments or memorials in places where significant events had taken place. Then he poured oil on the stone. Now that was not a strange or far-out action. Pouring oil on the stone was an act of consecration or devotion. We find that Jacob did the same thing when he finally came back to Bethel, after 30 years of being away. *"So Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it"*(Genesis 35:14).

Jacob changed the name of the place from Luz to Bethel, meaning "House of God" (v19). Then Jacob vowed that when he returned home, this place would be the "House of God," a place of worship for the true God (v22).

## **Doctrinal Points**

We have three doctrinal points about the grace of God from this account. God's grace is certainly stamped all over the event of Jacob's dream.

### **1. God's grace is seen in the timing of Jacob's dream.**

Jacob was no "Mr. Nice Guy" when he left Beersheba and came to Bethel. He had just deceived his father and stolen the blessing from Esau, and we don't read of Jacob saying he was sorry to Esau, or to his father, or to God. So it was certainly not for any good deed on Jacob's part that God chose to reveal himself to Jacob in this dream.

Look at the grace of God in the amazing promises that God made to Jacob: *"I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. 14 Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. 15 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 spoken to you"*(v13-15).

Here God confirmed the Abrahamic Covenant once again to Jacob. Blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant were part of Isaac's blessing on Jacob at the beginning of the chapter, but now God Himself confirmed the Covenant to Jacob. Can you believe it? Think of the timing of this event. When Jacob least deserves God's favor, that's the time God confirms the covenant with him! Why? What is the teaching here? Answer: It is the grace of God!! Grace is "God's unmerited favor" toward man. God's grace is certainly seen in the timing of Jacob's dream.

Think of the timing of God in reference to our salvation. Romans 5:8 says, *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Notice the timing -- while we were **still sinners**, Christ died for us! Now that is the grace of God! God's grace is seen in the timing of Jacob's dream.

### **2. God's grace is seen in the meaning of Jacob's dream.**

What was the meaning of this dream about the staircase ascending from earth to heaven, and the angels going up and down? Was it the idea that Jacob could climb up to heaven? Certainly not! The essential meaning of the dream was that in spite of Jacob's

past, God was willing to bridge the gap between heaven and earth, and have genuine and uninterrupted communion (or communication) and close fellowship with Jacob. Now **that** is grace!

Do you see the application for today? Because of God's grace, there is a bridge across the gap between God and mankind, and communication, fellowship, and communion between God and man is possible. We know that this is only possible because of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us.

In essence, that is what the Lord told Nathanael in John 1:50-51: *"Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." 51 And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."*

It is quite possible that Nathanael had been meditating on this passage in Genesis 28 while he sat under the fig tree, and the Lord knew it. The Lord Jesus took the account of Jacob's dream and revealed that He Himself is like the ladder or the staircase of the dream. **He** is the means by which the gap between man and God is bridged. As 1 Timothy 2:5 tells us, *"there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus..."*

God's grace is seen in the meaning of Jacob's dream.

### **3. God's grace is seen in the receiving of Jacob's dream.**

How did Jacob receive this dream? What was his response? If you read the commentaries on this passage, you will find that there are differences of opinion. Some commentators see Jacob as making a very unspiritual response. He didn't confess his sins, and he was not sensitive to God's presence (v16). It even sounds like Jacob was surprised! "Oh, Wow!" *"Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it."* He is viewed as having an unhealthy fear of God: *"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!"(v17).*

In addition, the commentators who view Jacob's response as unspiritual feel that he showed unbelief and doubt by using the word **"if"** in his vow: *"If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, 21 so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. 22 And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You" (v20-21. **If** God will be with me? God had just said He would be with him! And then he bargained selfishly with God. Notice that the emphasis is on 'me' and 'I' in verses 20-21. And big deal – he promised to give only a **tenth** back to the Lord, when he should have promised **everything** (v22). "I'll give you a dime, Lord, for every dollar you give me!" How selfish and unspiritual could he be?*

But on the other hand, there are many commentators who see Jacob in a good light here. He was aware that God visited him, he showed a reverential fear of God, and he didn't take the event lightly. He set up a pillar as a monument and a memorial, and renamed the place "Bethel," the House of God. And his vow was not filled with doubt -- the "if" was just the way vows were stated in those days. That "if" could have been translated, **"since"** God will be with me. In addition, the vow was not meant to be selfish bargaining with God, but rather a pledge to God. So you have both ways of looking at Jacob here in this passage. What is the right answer? I don't think we can be sure.

My own position is a "middle of the road" position. Jacob's response was basically a good response, but it was not the response of a mature believer. Jacob certainly had a long way to go in the school of God before he would finally emerge as the "man of worship" that God intended him to be.

In any case, the grace of God is seen in the receiving of the dream, regardless of Jacob's response. There was no rebuke from God. Even though Jacob did not confess his sins, and only seemed concerned about his own welfare, God's message to Jacob did not change. God's grace doesn't hinge on human response -- aren't you glad about that? God's grace is seen in the receiving of Jacob's dream.

## **Practical Application**

### **What is your response to the grace of God?**

This practical application is for Christians and non-Christians alike. If you are not yet a believer, what is your response to the grace of God? God loves you, and in His grace He has provided salvation for you. Christ has died for your sins! What is your response? Is it a response of unbelief and doubt? Why not put aside your doubts and respond right now with thanks to God for his love and grace, and put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

Christians, what is your response to the grace of God? Is it a response of bargaining with God, or making deals with God? "Lord, if you get me out of this problem, I'll serve you more." "Lord, if you bless me financially, I'll tithe more faithfully." "Lord, if you get me a different job, I'll go to church more often." (And on and on we could go!) Or is your response a glad recognition of what the grace of God is all about? We deserve **nothing** from God, but He has given us **everything** in Christ. Do we respond with love and devotion, with willing service for Him -- and with at least tithing?

What is your response to the grace of God?