

Genesis 28:10-22 • Jacob's Ladder

Introduction

Every true Christian has a “conversion experience”, a time and place to which God led them to the revelation of the truth of the role and person of Jesus Christ. Just like us before that experience, Jacob had an intellectual knowledge of the existence of God, but not a personal encounter that established and defined a relationship that forever changed his life. Although one of the most familiar stories in the Old Testament, Jacob's ladder is really the first documented “conversion experience” in the Bible and is rich with layered references to the coming work of the Messiah and our relationship with God in general. It's the story of how each new generation of Believer inherits God's promises and work accomplished through previous generations, and makes it their own personal legacy to be lived and handed down to the next.

¹⁰Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. ¹²He 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.

[Read v.10-12]

Q: Was this “ladder” the type of device we think of today?

A: It could be; it could also be a narrow staircase or set of steps. What is important about the ladder is that it is the only, narrow passageway between heaven and earth.

Q: Why does it say “he came to a certain place”? What is the inference in using “certain” to describe this place?

A: Jacob is on a long journey and will always be seeking a safe place to spend each night, a place to rest from the weariness of travel that will provide protection from the environment, wild animals, and robbers. Being unfamiliar with the area, it's a way of indicating a “happy coincidence” of finding such a place, which will later be explained as not being a coincidence at all.

Q: What does the ladder represent?

1. **Basic Explanation:** There is only one way to/from God, only one way from which His servants come to carry out His work, only one way to approach Him and have access and fellowship with Him.
2. **Deeper Symbolism:** It is a teaching of the Messiah as the One and Only Way to God.

Jesus answered and said to him, “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.”

John 1:50-51

¹³And 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.

¹⁴Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

¹⁵Behold, 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.”

[Read v.13-14]

Q: Why do you suppose God introduces Himself to Jacob the way that He does?

A: Jacob most certainly would relate personally to this being the God of his fathers Abraham and Isaac and be more than familiar with what his fathers’ spiritual faith and relationship with God accomplished in their lives. But he would have also probably understood that this is the One Who made and fulfilled covenants and promises with them.

Q: What is the nature of the first two promises God makes to Jacob?

1. “Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south” is passing along the promises He made to Abraham and Isaac (note the word “also”) that will materialize in the form of much more than just the nation of Israel to follow. The language of “spreading out” in all directions seems to indicate the spiritual legacy of Israel that will reach every corner of the earth.
2. “All the families of earth shall be blessed” is the promise of the Messiah to come through his direct seedline Who will provide to all the earth the access to the Father that the ladder of the vision represents. Note what Peter says at Pentecost...

Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”

Acts 2:38-39

Point: *The first promises have to do with God’s overall and will and calling for Jacob’s life, tying him to a greater spiritual heritage both from his past and to come in the future; a bridge between spiritual generations, so to speak.*

[Read v.15]

Q: What is the nature of God’s third promise to Jacob?

A: It’s personal. Whereas the first two promises confirm those made to his fathers and that will continue through future generations, God reassures Him personally for the work He will do in Jacob’s life.

Point: *This is the pattern of God’s working in every person of every age and generation, that we are called to continue and participate in the spiritual legacy begun through our spiritual fathers before us that continues to this day, but in the process personally called to individual faith and fellowship in Him.*

¹⁶Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." ¹⁷He 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."

[Read v.16-17]

Q: How does Jacob's statement in v.16 relate back to v.11?

A: The place that Jacob thought he'd found as a "happy coincidence" turned out to be no coincidence at all.

Q: What does Jacob's statement in v.16 indicate about the condition of his own spiritual walk?

A: Although he had knowledge of God passed down through his family, he did not have a **personal** knowledge of Him and probably felt that God was something very distant and far away from his personal life, something more theoretical than material.

Q: What is the sequence of Jacob's reactions? How might we relate to it?

A: Revelation, fear/reverence, acknowledgment. We have an encounter with Christ that brings us the unavoidable revelation of Who He is, our heart is brought into reverent fear of His person and presence, and we are changed in our acknowledgment of Him from that day forward.

Q: How are Jacob's descriptions of this place also descriptions of the Messiah?

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Matthew 7:13-14

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22

¹⁸So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. ¹⁹He called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz.

²⁰Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, ²¹and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. ²²This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

[Read v.18-22]

Q: Why does Jacob pour oil on the stone?

A: This is the method of consecrating something dedicated to or for the presence of God. (Exodus 30:25-26) What he is **NOT** doing is erecting or establishing an idol, but dedicating something that has been in the presence of God for future service to God.

Observation: *There are MANY references to God as the Rock. (For instance, Deuteronomy 32:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:4.) It may be worthwhile to compare these verses with similar references to "rock" in your concordance.*

Q: Is this the first significant event recorded as having taken place at Bethel?

A: No, this was the place of the second altar that Abraham built and worshipped God as he was coming into Canaan for the first time. (Genesis 12:6-9) It's interesting that both as Abraham was coming from Haran and Jacob is going to Haran, that they both have the same place in common where they encountered the same God, sharing the same promises, and resulting in a changed life. Different personal destinations, but the same God working the same work and promises through both!

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Q: Is Jacob trying to strike a bargain or dictate terms to God?

A: Jacob's use of the word "if" is really used to mean "since"; it's not an indication of a question but a faith statement such as "*If God is for us, who is against us?*" (Romans 8:31) His statements are really much more along the lines of a promise on his part than as some kind of negotiation.

Q: How would you characterize the things Jacob lists that should be provided by God?

A: They are not wants or wishes but needs. Jacob is not seeking wealth or fame or power, but the day-to-day needs of his life.

Q: Beyond just the aspect of giving back to God, what is significant about Jacob's promise concerning the pillar he has set up in Bethel?

A: Currently Jacob is on a journey taking him **AWAY** from Bethel and the Promised Land. It's a faith-statement that God **WILL** follow through with His promises and enable Jacob's return to Bethel to worship Him, a confirmation that **ALL** of the promises of God will be fulfilled.

Overall Application

- *How many ways do you believe there are to God? How strongly do you cling to the biblical assertion that Christ is the only Way? Will a person be able to properly connect with God as long as they believe there are alternate routes to Him?*
- *What is the calling of God for your life in terms of our spiritual forefathers? How are you participating and embracing the promises and calls handed down from previous generations?*
- *What is God's calling for your life personally? How more or less do you approach it like Jacob?*
- *Share with the group your first encounter with Christ. How did it change you? How does it continue to change you?*