

Genesis 28:10-22 and 29:1-14

Fearing that her scheme would end in disaster, Rebekah resorted to deception once again.

Genesis 27:46 **"And Rebekah said to Isaac, I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?"**

Yes, Rebekah was deceiving her husband again, but her complaint hit a responsive chord.

Isaac was fully aware of the grief that Esau's wives had caused in the family, and he certainly wasn't willing to repeat the process.

So, taking the leadership in his home, he called his son before him and gave him his instructions.

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Thus it was that Jacob left home in honour, an obedient son, and the possessor of the Abrahamic Covenant, and with the promise of new horizons.

But everything wasn't as rosy as it might seem.

For one thing, Jacob had never dealt with his sin.

He had left an angry brother behind, but he had taken the old Jacob, the old unrepentant Jacob along with him.

And it would take years of hardship before he would graduate from the school of hard knocks.

Or more correctly, it would take years of hardship before Jacob would become a useful servant of God.

Genesis 28:10-11 **"And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran. 11: And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep."**

Jacob had a goodly heritage.

Yes, his grandfather and his father had both enjoyed a unique relationship with God. In fact, He had spoken to each of them personally, and on more than one occasion.

And no doubt Jacob envied this relationship, for he did value spiritual things.

However, up to this point, his own relationship to God had been more or less head knowledge.

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When nightfall overtook him, Jacob was about 70 miles north of his home.

Coming from a wealthy family, he may have had a camel or an ass to bring him on his way, but we don't really know how he travelled.

Whatever the case, he was now about two or three days' journey from home, and possibly a little homesick.

Yes, Jacob had been a homeboy, and by now the excitement of new things had been replaced by the rigors of the journey.

As he lay his weary head on his rather hard pillow, he was still quite shaken by his brother's threats.

However, in all his thoughts, there seems to have been no sign of remorse or repentance.

Yes, Jacob was very much his own man, and it would take over 20 years for God to change that.

V 11 says **"he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set."**

Obviously Jacob hadn't made any particular plans.

It was simply a case of finding a suitable spot before it got dark.

But I don't think he ended up in this **"certain place,"** as it is called, by chance.

Certainly, as far as Jacob was concerned, he had simply **"lighted upon"** it, but actually the place where He bedded down

for the night was very close to the spot where his grandfather had built an altar many years ago.

We see that in Genesis 12:8 **"And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD."**

Often we don't realize what we owe to the godly men and women who have gone before us.

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No, this wasn't just a place to sleep. This was **"the house God."**

In fact this was the very place, and the very time, that God had chosen to reveal Himself in a dream.

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Just recently I talked to a Christian friend of mine who now lives out West but was visiting in our area.

He had recently recovered from two very serious operations that had been performed to unclog the arteries on both sides of his neck.

It was good to see him healthy again, particularly when I knew he had passed through some very rough times.

He told me that the long times of waiting before the operations had been very stressful.

And not only that, but during both operations, he had been very close to death.

As we sat on the couch talking, he asked me if I believed in dreams.

I said that I did, for they are well documented in scripture, but that I had never had any significant dreams myself.

He then told me about a dream that had been a great blessing to him.

It happened during that stressful time of waiting.

In his dream, he was riding in an airplane that was having motor trouble.

However, after several near crashes, it landed safely.

In the dream, his old boss had been the pilot while he had simply been a passenger.

As they walked away from plane, he could sense that both of them were feeling very well physically.

The dream seemed to alleviate his fears and gave him the assurance that although he would be going through dangerous times, the Lord would bring him through safely.

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Jacob was somewhat in the same position as my friend.

He was facing the unknown, probably with a certain amount of apprehension.

Actually, he was fleeing for his life, forced to leave the home where he had been a rich man's son, but now reduced to the few things he could carry.

True, Isaac had bestowed God's blessing on him, but that was rather theoretical in his experience.

However, before he faced another day, his grandfather's God would have changed all that.

V 12-15 "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.

13: And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;
14: And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

15: And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

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This dream was like Abraham's experience all over again.

And certainly God's promises were as unconditional as they had been in his grandfather's day.

I am with thee, I will keep thee, I will bring thee again into this land, and "I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

Yes, all of these promises rested on God's power and God's faithfulness.

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Most of Jacob's dream dealt with the Promised Land, and that was very important.

It was important because God wanted to impress upon Jacob's mind that Canaan was his home.

Jacob thought he would be returning in a relatively short time, and certainly his mother and father were of that opinion, but God knew better.

God knew that Jacob's bargains and Laban's schemes would delay his return for 20 years, so that night He indelibly impressed Canaan on Jacob's mind. **"And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land."**

From V 13 to V 15, the dream was all about the Abrahamic Covenant, and, of course, the Promised Land, and considering God's overall purpose, that was understandable.

However, V 12, with the ladder and the angels, didn't seem to fit into this very Jewish dream.

But actually, if we look closely, we will find that it does.

You see, Israel's hope has everything to do with the church's hope, and this dream, although very Jewish, is actually concerned with all of God's elect.

It involves the Old Testament saints and the New Testament saints, and where they are concerned, the **"angels of God"** must be there.

Yes, God's angels are very much involved in the lives of His elect.

Concerning these heavenly beings, Hebrews 1:14 asks the question--"**Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?**"

So in Jacob's dream, the "**angels of God**" were continually ascending to heaven, no doubt to report on their activities, and descending again to accomplish God's desire on the "**heirs of salvation.**"

But why were they using a ladder?

After all, angels have wings and can fly.

To answer that question, we must have a closer look at this particular ladder.

V 12 says that the ladder was "**set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven.**"

It was not a rope ladder let down from heaven so man could catch hold and climb up by his own efforts.

No, this ladder had been "**set up on the earth.**"

In fact, it had been planted in the soft hay of a manger in the little town of Bethlehem!

And it was a ladder whose top "**reached to heaven.**"

Because of man's sin, and because of God's mercy, He has established a link between earth and heaven, and that link is His Only Begotten Son.

Jesus knew that He was that *ladder*, and He told us so.

Yes, He positively identified Himself as the ladder **"set up on the earth"** to bridge the gap between deity and humanity.

We can read His words in John 1:47-51:

"Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!

48: Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.

49: Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

50: Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than

these.

51: And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

And this ladder is the only way to heaven.

Jesus said Himself, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."**

But we still have to answer the question,

*Why were **"the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man"**?*

It is because Jesus is God's complete program for salvation.

Not only is Jesus man's only way to heaven, but He is also the angels' only means to minister to mankind.

Remember what Hebrews 1:14 said? **"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"**

If there had been no ladder, there would have been no **"heirs of salvation,"** and so no real reason for angels to leave heaven at all.

Oh, God might have had a few special missions for them to go on, but essentially they are **"ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation."**

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But we still might ask, *Why was this ladder included in Jacob's dream?*

If God's purpose was to firmly establish Canaan in Jacob's mind, why was Christ foreshadowed in his dream as the way to

heaven and as the mediator between God and man?

Well, it is because the Abrahamic Covenant, and indeed the nation of Israel, has everything to do with God's way to heaven.

You see, when the ladder was "**set up on the earth,**" it was set up in *Israel*.

That's why God told Jacob, as He had told his grandfather before him, "**in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.**"

No, you can't really separate the hope of Israel from the hope of the bride of Christ.

For the saints of the Old Testament and the saints of New Testament, Christ is the only way to heaven.

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V 16-19 "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep,
and he said, Surely the LORD is in this
place; and I knew it not.

17: And he was afraid, and said, How
dreadful is this place! this is none
other but the house of God, and this is
the gate of heaven.

18: And Jacob rose up early in the
morning, and took the stone that he had
put for his pillows, and set it up for
a pillar, and poured oil upon the top
of it.

19: And he called the name of that
place Bethel: but the name of that city
was called Luz at the first."

This definitely wasn't one of those dreams
that you can't remember in the morning.
No, it had a profound effect upon Jacob.

Although he didn't set up an altar as his grandfather had, he certainly did set up a memorial.

It was a lasting memorial to mark a memorable event.

Yes, this was the first time that God had ever appeared to Jacob, and he was anxious to mark this place as "**the house of God.**"

And not only was it a memorial to God's presence, it was a testimony to the fact that Jacob would not forget Canaan.

And it would still be there to greet him when he had come full circle.

V 20-22 **"And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on,**

21: So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God:

22: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee."

I'm not a scholar in Hebrew or Greek, in fact, without the spell check on my computer, I'm not even a scholar in English.

So when it comes to original text, I must rely on others.

In V 20, Jacob's vow begins with the little word "**if**," which seems to indicate that he hadn't paid attention to the fact that God's promises were unconditional.

God had just said, **"I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest."**

So to respond with the words, **"If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go"** would seem a little out of character even for a schemer like Jacob.

Yes, Jacob may have made a clever bargain with his brother, and he would certainly make several bargains with his uncle that were maybe not so clever, but I don't think he was making a deal with God to get what he already had.

So what did Jacob really mean when he said **"If God will be with me"?**

I checked with five commentators concerning this verse, and four out of five said

that the little word "**if**" would be better translated "since," and of course that would change the whole meaning of the verse.

If Jacob actually said, since "--**God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go,**" then his vow becomes a recognition of God's faithfulness, and a determination to cleave to Abraham's God.

And I tend to go along with this interpretation since it agrees with the general context of the passage.

However, this whole problem is further complicated by the fact that most of the 9 or 10 versions of the Bible I checked translated this word "**if.**"

So the bottom line is--I can't really give you an answer, only an opinion.

However, it is still pretty clear that Jacob was greatly impressed, and he resolved to honour God by giving Him a tenth of all he possessed.

Now God didn't actually command tithing until the dispensation of Law, but apparently it had been a natural response long before that.

For instance, Abraham gave **"tithes of all"** to Melchizedek, and now we see his grandson Jacob spontaneously promising to give a tenth.

At the time of this vow, Jacob had nothing to give. His promise depended entirely on the Lord's supply--**"and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee."**

So in spite of this little word **"If,"** I don't think Jacob was trying to make a

bargain with God, but rather was
expressing his gratitude and love.

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As we begin Chapter 29, Jacob has completed
his long journey of about 450 miles.
He was now entering a foreign land, a land
that he had only heard about from his
grandfather.

Abraham had left Padan-aram some 150 years
before, and Jacob was the first and
only member of his family to return.
Padan-aram means "between the rivers," and
is in the general area of the Tigris
and the Euphrates.

It was there, in Haran, that Abraham's
father Terah died, freeing his son to
enter the Promised Land.

Haran was also the parental home of Jacob's mother, and, of course, her brother Laban.

So this was the place where Jacob was to seek a bride. **"Arise, go to Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother."**

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After that eventful night in Bethel, none of Jacob's journey is recorded.

Genesis 29:1 opens with the words, **"Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east."**

Not only was he in a strange new land, but he found himself in a strange new situation.

In Canaan, he had been the son of a wealthy man with servants to command, but here he was just a travelling stranger.

However, seeing a group of shepherds, he immediately felt at home, maybe a little too much at home.

He was a herdsman himself, and the son of a herdsman. In fact, he was a grandson of a herdsman.

Yes, Jacob was in his element.

V 2-3 **"And he looked, and behold a well in the field, and, lo, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks: and a great stone was upon the well's mouth.**

3: And thither were all the flocks gathered: and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the

sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in his place."

So, drawing a deep breath and putting on a great show of self-confidence, he walked right up to the shepherds and said, "--- **My brethren, whence be ye? And they said, Of Haran are we."**

V 5 **"And he said unto them, Know ye Laban the son of Nahor? And they said, We know him.** (Actually they may have known him a little too well.)

6: And he said unto them, Is he well? And they said, He is well: and, behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep."

So here he was newly arrived from a strange country, and the first people he met just happened to be from Haran, and, of course, knew Laban.

And to top it all off, the very girl for whom he was searching, although he didn't know it yet, had just appeared on the horizon.

Now some people would call that a coincidence, but we know better, don't we?

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However, even before Rachel arrived, Jacob was meddling in someone else's business.

Granted, his family had been in the livestock business for at least three generations, so he certainly knew the business.

And like his father and grandfather, Jacob was probably a hard worker, with an eye for profits.

So it's not surprising that these men sitting around the well doing nothing got under his skin.

After all, where he came from it was customary to water the sheep in the evening after a full day of grazing.

So, in spite of the fact that he was a newcomer, he just couldn't help telling them how to do their job.

V 7 **"And he said, Lo, it is yet high day, neither is it time that the cattle should be gathered together: water ye the sheep, and go and feed them."**

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I heard about a CEO who was hired to shape up a company.

He was a real go getter, and he was determined to get rid of company slackers as soon as possible.

So the very first day on the job, he made a tour of the facility, and immediately noticed a fellow leaning up against a wall.

The room was full of workers, and he knew instinctively that this was his chance to let everyone know he meant business! So, walking right up to the man, he demanded, "How much do you make a week?"

A little surprised the young fellow said, "\$300. Why do you ask?"

Pulling \$1,200 out of his wallet, he yelled, "Here's four weeks' pay. Now GET OUT and don't come back!"

Feeling pretty good about himself, he looked around the room and asked, "Does anyone want to tell me what that goof-off did around here?"

From across the room came a voice, "Pizza
delivery man from Domino's."

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Well, Jacob had started giving out advice
before he knew the whole story, and the
shepherds weren't long in filling him
in.

V 8 **"And they said, We cannot, until all the
flocks be gathered together, and till
they roll the stone from the well's
mouth; then we water the sheep."**

Knowing Jacob, he probably would have given
them his opinion of their inefficient
custom, but something else, or should I
say *someone else* suddenly claimed his
full attention.

V 9-10 **"And while he yet spake with them,
Rachel came with her father's sheep:
for she kept them.**

10: And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother."

Personally, I think Jacob was showing off, and certainly he was showing the locals what he thought of their ridiculous custom.

V 11-12 **"And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept.**

12: And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rebekah's son: and she ran and told her father."

If V 12 had preceded V 11, I think Rachel would have been a little less surprised.

Yes, it might have been better to tell her who he was before he kissed her.

However, we don't read that she made any great objection.

V 13-14 **"And it came to pass, when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. And he told Laban all these things.**

14: And Laban said to him, Surely thou art my bone and my flesh. And he abode with him the space of a month."

This seems like a repeat performance.

Remember back in Genesos 24, how enthusiastically Laban had greeted

Abraham's servant after he had seen his sister's jewellery, of course?

We see that in Genesis 24: 29-31 "---**Laban ran out unto the man, unto the well. 30: And it came to pass, when he saw the earring and bracelets upon his sister's hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, Thus spake the man unto me; that he came unto the man; and, behold, he stood by the camels at the well. 31: And he said, Come in, thou blessed of the LORD; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels."**

Yes, he had given him the royal treatment, but it all came to naught.

After the initial gifts, the possibility of material gain completely dried up, and

he never heard from his rich uncle again.

Perhaps it would be different this time.

And, in fact, it was different, as we will see in our next lesson.

True, Jacob didn't have a lot of money, but he did have a lot of potential, and it wasn't long before Laban had figured out a way to tap into this valuable resource.

Oh, Jacob was a sharp man when it came to making a deal, but this time he had met his match!