

## Stairway to (and from) Heaven – *Genesis 27:41-28:22*

**Introduction** – Do we realize how near heaven is to us? The blessing of being the covenant people of God means that God is with us (Emmanuel), that God is our Almighty Protector (El Shaddai), and this is true even when it seems He is far away and we feel alone and unprotected. Jacob's life is full of trial and turmoil. Many think his acts of deceit to take the birthright and blessing, which Esau thought was his own, was unfaithful, even sinful. It is possible that on that dark night for Jacob, he doubted himself – and his God.

Remember we are in Genesis, the story (or the beginning of the story) of God's glorious plan of redemption for mankind. For all the twists and turns, it turns out God is always in control, always accomplishing His purposes.

**Overview** – Clearly, Esau understood his “blessing” (vv39-40) as anything but a blessing, and he turned with hatred towards Jacob, making plans to murder his twin brother (v41). Rebekah catches wind of the plots and tells Jacob to flee to her brother, Laban, until Esau calms down (vv42-45). She then uses the terrible marriages of Esau as her reason to get Isaac to agree that Jacob should go to her family (27:46-28:2). Isaac sends Jacob, but first gives another blessing (revealing Isaac's full repentance), this one not under any deception, and full of the Abrahamic, patriarchal blessing passing down to the one El Shaddai had chosen (vv3-5).

Another indication of Esau's lack of repentance comes as he tries to make amends by marrying (again), this time a daughter of Ishmael (vv6-9). He remains ignorant, rebellious, or apathetic to the covenant promises and plans of God.

As Jacob traveled, he arrived outside a city (Luz) and in the darkness, he lay down, placing a rock at his head (for protection?) and slept. There he had the famous dream where he beheld a ladder (or more likely, a stairway as you might see on a pyramid or ziggurat) with angels descending and ascending (vv10-12). And behold, the LORD stood above it and declared the great Abrahamic blessing to Jacob, promising to be with him and to keep him (vv13-15). When Jacob awoke, he was filled with dread realizing that the LORD was there with him (vv16-17). He thought he was in the middle of nowhere, outside of his home, his land, his family, his covenant, and yet here he was in “*the house of God*” and at “*the gate of heaven*” (v17). He then rose up, set the stone up as a pillar and anointed it with oil as a memorial, named that place “Bethel,” and made a vow of allegiance, “*the LORD shall be my God*” (vv18-22).

**A Short Excursion on Covenant, Esau, and Marriage** – “*Marriage is covenant, a solemn vow, established and administered by God, which is attended with blessings and curses.*” Esau treated his birthright with contempt for a pot of stew, and the blessings upon his father and grandfather with ridicule. He took wives who were daughters of pagans (26:34f) which were a grief to his parents (27:46). And just before we hear of Jacob's travels to avoid a Canaanite wife, Esau blows it again, marrying a daughter of Ishmael (28:6-9), his lame attempt at conformity.

Young people, understand! Parents, instruct your sons and daughters! You must understand and love your covenant status with God to be prepared to understand and love a marriage covenant. A man who treats his covenant status with God flippantly will treat his wife worse. A man who knows he stands under the showers of God's covenant blessings and lives like it will treat his wife likewise. The same goes for a woman. Where else will you learn and be empowered to live with someone as incompatible as a spouse? “*I have known many happy marriages, but I've never known a compatible one...*” – GK Chesterton. A faithful marriage is between *two believers* who know what to do when someone sins. They know the acts of repentance, confession, and forgiveness. They know the tender friendship of prayer being shared, where the Word is read and meditated upon together, where mutual submission to the Lord leads to glad submission and acceptance of God's roles for marriage, and where God's desire for godly offspring is shared and sought – for that is the fruit of covenant – generational blessings.

And what if you find yourself in a bad marriage, where your spouse is nothing but trouble to you? Then you are in the same situation as Christ with His bride. Set Christ before you as your example and hope – for every marriage is but a pale portrait of the great marriage. And that end-of-time marriage is where you find your eternal identity and present strength. Remember, the purpose of marriage is not to make you happy, but to make you holy.

**Covenant in the House of God** – Jacob has left his home alone. In the darkness of night he dreams and, Behold (three times, v12, 13, 15), he sees and hears. This is the first time (recorded) that Jacob hears directly from God, and the words confirm the promises of the covenant to him and to his descendants. They will be as the dust of the earth and they will be spread all over the earth. In his seed all the families of the earth will be blessed. And then he receives the promise that God will be with him, will keep him, will bring him back to this land, and will not leave him. The promise was to Abraham and his descendants, to Isaac and his descendants, and now to Jacob and his. And remember, we are the descendants of Abraham who have the faith of Abraham. For a time, Jacob may have thought that story was Abraham's and not really his. Through

Jesus Christ, we have been made sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, heirs of the same covenant promises to us and to the world. Now notice: where did this renewal occur? At the Gate of Heaven and the House of God. The covenant wasn't made with Jacob there for it already existed. But it was renewed. It was his. It strengthened him for the journey ahead – a journey that he knew nothing about at the time. Orient your lives around the Lord's Day Covenant Renewal Service. He is here with His angels and archangels ministering to you, preparing you for the journey ahead.

**Faithful Responses of Fear, Worship, and Devotion** – We are to worship God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:28f). And it is interesting that the writer of Hebrews says that after describing our close proximity to heaven and Jesus and the throne of grace (12:22-27). This is Jacob's first response when he realizes that he is at the gate of heaven and the home of God (Gen 28:17 – not just “*awesome*”-NKJV, ESV, but “*dreadful*”-AV). Then Jacob took the stone and set up a memorial, anointing its “*head*” with oil. Throughout the Old Testament the pouring out of oil symbolized the pouring out of the Spirit in an anointing as well as a pouring out of oneself in devotion to the Lord.

And we see this response also in Jacob's words. In his fearful declaration, he knew God was with him (vv16-17). Do not read this “if” clause as a word of uncertainty (v20), but rather, “if this is really all true (and it is) then...” – and he vows his devotion to the Lord, “*the LORD shall be my God*” (v21). No longer just Abraham's God. No longer just Isaac's God. My God. **The Tithe** – He isn't bargaining with God (v20) and he isn't bribing God with a tithe (v22). This is a response to the overwhelming grace of God. Jacob says “*of all that You give me...*” not “*of all that I make...*” Paul later says, “*What do you have that you did not receive?*” (1 Cor 4:7). Jacob is making this vow because He believes the Word of God given to Him. He is responding to a commitment, not first making a commitment. We love because He first loved us. We give because He first gave to us. We tithe because He gave us the hundred. The tithe, biblically understood, is the mark of a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7). It marks out a man or woman who cannot get over how abundantly God has given and provided for them.

**You Can't Buy a Stairway to Heaven** - You can't buy a stairway to heaven. You can't build a gate to heaven (Babel means “*gate of heaven*”). But Jacob found the true Babel and it came from heaven, not from men. It came by grace and not by works. It came by promise and the Word God spoke and not by our own incantations. And the Greater Jacob is that stairway *from and to* heaven (John 1:43-51). Jesus is the gate and stairway. He is the door; He is the way. And He is the temple of God, the True Bethel (John 2:19). He is the place where God dwells with His people. He is the place where angels minister to those who are being saved (Heb 1:14, Psalm 91:11-12). Can you say with Jacob, “*the LORD shall be MY God*”?

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