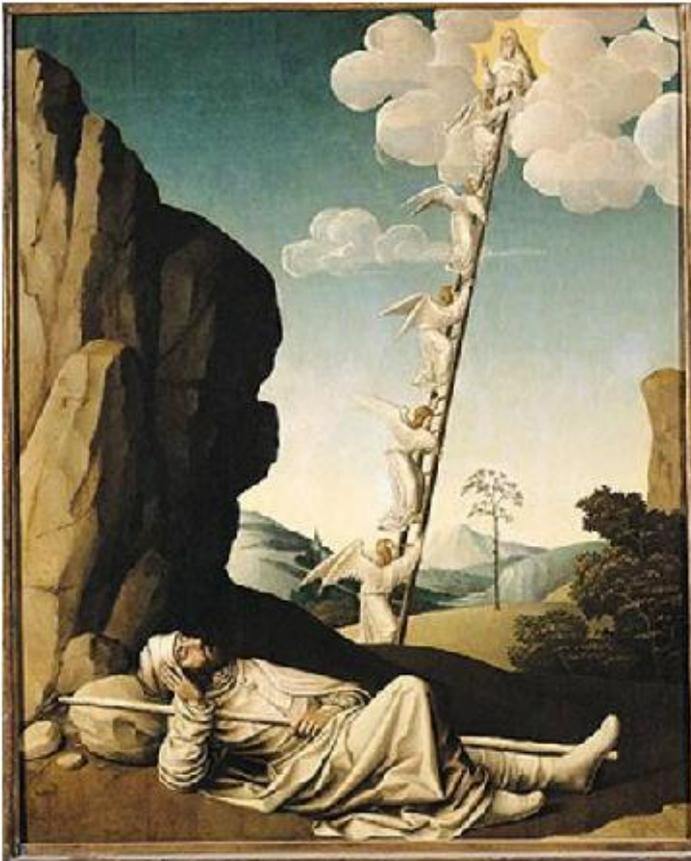


Jacob's Dream & Ladder



Genesis 28/Epistle to the Hebrews

Hamilton Smith

Genesis chapter 28 brings before us the first stage in Jacob's flight from Beersheba, in the Land of Promise, to Padanaram in the land of Mesopotamia.

The previous chapter had presented a sorrowful picture of the household of the patriarch Isaac. Failure marks every member of the family. Isaac is seen as a feeble old man, governed by his appetites; Rebekah, plotting behind her husband's back, instructs her son Jacob to wrong his brother and deceive his father. Jacob, listening to his mother's evil advice, deliberately lies to his father, and supplants his brother; and Esau, discovering Jacob's treachery, plots to murder his brother at the first opportune moment.

As a result of all this corruption and deceit, Isaac has to dismiss Jacob from the home; Rebekah loses her favourite son never to see him again; Esau becomes a sorrow to his parents, and Jacob, for twenty years, becomes a wanderer in a strange land, banished from the home of his father and the Land of Promise.

In the first stage of his journey, Jacob lights upon a certain place where he tarries for the night. There we see him a lonely man with a stone for his pillow, only the sky above him, and darkness closing around him. Yet, strangely enough as we might think, it is in this lonely place, when lying on the stony bed his sin had made, that the Lord meets him. The Lord had nothing to say to him by his father's bedside, in the place of his sinning; but in the dreary spot where his sin had cast him, the Lord draws near, and turns his comfortless bed into a place of correction and consolation.

In spite of Jacob's many failures he was a man of faith, and blessed by God. His failures, indeed, obtain for him only trial and sorrow; his faith obtains for him a good report and a place amongst God's Old Testament worthies (**Heb. 11: 9, 21**). It is not otherwise with the believer today. On the one hand, God is not indifferent to our

failures, and the fleshly way we may speak and act; for these things we have to suffer under His government. On the other hand, God is not indifferent to what is of Himself in each believer, according to that word in **Hebrews 6: 10-12**, "*God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love.*" We alas! are sometimes over righteous in taking account of one another's failures, and unrighteous in forgetting what is of God in one another.

There are thus two things Jacob has to learn on this memorable occasion.

FIRST, for his consolation, he will learn that all his failures will not alter God's purpose to bless him in sovereign grace.

SECOND, for his correction, he will learn that God's sovereign grace will not stay God's chastening hand on account of his failures.

The sovereign grace of the Lord will not set aside the faithful government of the Lord. Jacob's circumstances are not altered; he still has to pursue his lonely way as a wanderer, and spend long years in toil and bondage, in the house of the stranger, as the result of his sin against his father and brother. He has to reap what he has sown. If Jacob deceives his father with the skins of goats so, in the years to come he will be deceived by his own sons with the blood of a goat. The sovereign grace, by which we are blessed, does not alter that memorable law, "*Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*" (**Gal. 6: 7**).

However, the very sin for which Jacob had to suffer became the occasion of displaying the grace and mercy of God to the sufferer. To make known this grace the Lord appears to him in a dream. Jacob sees a ladder set up on earth whose top reaches the heavens. He sees the angels of God ascending and descending on the ladder. More wonderful still, he sees that, "*The Lord stood*

above it." At the top of the ladder is the Lord of glory, at the bottom of the ladder is a failing, lonely man. Between the Lord at the top and Jacob at the bottom there are heavenly messengers from the Lord, and heavenly guardians for the saints, ascending and descending.

Then, most wonderful of all, to this feeble failing man below, the Lord of glory reveals Himself in sovereign grace as a Giver.

FIRST, the Lord unconditionally secures the promised Land to Jacob and his heirs. He says, *"The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed."*

SECOND, not only shall Jacob have the promise of the Land, but he shall have the presence of the Lord; not only the the gift but the Giver, for, says the Lord, *"I am with thee."*

THIRD, not only would he have the presence of the Lord, but he would have the support of the Lord, for the Lord can say, *"I will keep thee in all places whither thou goest."* If the Lord was with him He would be with him to preserve him.

FOURTH, when his wandering days are done the Lord will bring Jacob back to the Land that He has given him, for the Lord says *"I . . . will bring thee again into this land."* Jacob's sin may drive him from home; the Lord's grace will bring him home. Naomi says, after ten years of wandering, *"The Lord hath brought me home again."* Every sheep He picks up He brings home, and nothing but His home will do for His sheep.

We may wander, we may break down, we may fail most grievously, but at last He brings us home.

FINALLY, Jacob can depend upon the faithfulness of the Lord to His own word, for the Lord says, *"I will not leave thee, until I have done*

that which I have spoken to thee of." Whatever Jacob may be or do, and whatever we may be or do, He remains the same. Even if we are unfaithful, *"He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself"* (**2 Tim. 2: 13**)

ITS NEW TESTAMENT FULFILMENT

THE writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews alludes to the fine scene recorded in **Genesis 28**.

In **Hebrews 13: 5**, we read, *"He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."* Thus the promise made to Jacob is appropriated to the Christian. So we may rightly conclude that in the story of **Genesis 28** there is a shadowing forth of good things to come. In Genesis God is speaking to one of the fathers in a dream; in the Epistle to the Hebrews we have, no longer the partial revelation of a dream, but, the full revelation in the **Person of the Son**.

In Genesis Jacob is viewed as a pilgrim about to take a wilderness journey, with exceeding great and precious promises to support him in his journey and bring him home at last. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we have an application of Jacob's dream, giving it a fuller, richer meaning for the Christian. In this Epistle the believer is viewed as a stranger in this world, and as a pilgrim going on to another world (**Hebrews 11: 13; 13: 14**); and there is set before us a glorious Person, and great truths to support us on our journey and bring us to glory at last.

Jacob's dream opens with a vision of the Lord in glory at the top of the ladder: so the Epistle to the Hebrews opens with the great truth that the Lord of glory is *"on high."* The Son having finished His work on earth has *"Sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on*

high." Throughout the Epistle this great truth is kept prominently before us.

In **Hebrews 1: 3**, He is presented as having sat down on the right hand of God, because of the glory of His Person: in **Hebrews 8: 1**, He is there as our great High Priest: in **Hebrews 10: 12**, He is there as a proof that His work is finished, and in **Hebrews 12: 2**, He is there as having trodden the path of faith and reached the goal.

If, however, the Lord was at the top of Jacob's ladder, at the bottom there was a poor weak failing man, encompassed with infirmities and surrounded by temptations. So in the Epistle to the Hebrews, when we come to the second chapter we find a company of people being brought on their way to glory. They are spoken of as "*many sons*" who are going to partake of glory but, at present, are partakers of flesh and blood; and, as such, are subject to temptations, compassed about with infirmities, and faced with needs, liable to persecutions, exposed to the contradiction of sinners, and opposed by adversaries (**Hebrews 2: 14-18; 4: 15, 16; 10: 33; 12: 3; 13: 3**).

Then, in Jacob's dream, between the Lord at the top, and Jacob at the bottom, there were angels ascending and descending. So in the Epistle to the Hebrews, between the Lord on high brought before us in **Hebrews 2**, we read of the angels who are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs; of salvation (**Hebrews 1: 13, 14**.) Here then at the outset of the Epistle we have a remarkable answer to Jacob's dream.

Again we learn, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the two great lessons that Jacob had to learn at Luz.

FIRST we are blessed by the sovereign grace of God that has taken us up, and made us heirs of the glory to which we are being brought through a wilderness scene.

SECOND, the sovereign grace of God that has called us to glory does not set aside the government of God that deals with us in chastening on the way to glory (**Hebrews 2: 10; 12: 6**).

Moreover, we can see in the Epistle how rich the provision that God has made for our wilderness journey is. We find, indeed, there is in the Epistle, an answer to every blessing that grace secured to Jacob. The first great truth that Jacob learned before he took a step of his journey, was, that the end of the journey is secured.

The promised Land was assured to Jacob and his heirs. So in the Epistle to the Hebrews again and again, we find that heaven is secured to us. In **Hebrews 2: 10**, we are passing on to glory; in **Hebrews 3: 1**, we are partakers of the heavenly calling; in **Hebrews 4: 9**, there is a rest that remaineth for us. In **Hebrews 6**, the Forerunner, even Jesus, has entered within the veil. In **Hebrews 9: 24**, Christ has entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

Thus, in different ways, the great truth is pressed upon us that, just as of old the Land was secured to Jacob, so heaven is secured to the Christian. Whatever difficulties we may have to meet, whatever trials there may be in the way, though dark valleys, rough ways and many a storm may intervene, yet, at every step, the glory shines before us. **God would have us pursue our pilgrim path in the light of the glory to which it leads.**

Further, Jacob had, not only the gift of the Land, but, the presence of the Giver. So as Christians we not only have heaven in view as our goal, but we have the Lord's presence with us on the way to

heaven. Both at the beginning of the Epistle, and at the end, the writer quotes passages from the Old Testament to prove the Lord is present with His people.

In **Hebrews 2**, quoting from **Psalm 22**, he says, *"In the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto Thee;"* and again he quotes **Isaiah 8**, *"Behold I and the children which God hath given Me."* Then, as the Epistle draws to its close, the Lord's words to Jacob are quoted to show that throughout our journey the Lord is with us, as He has said. *"I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."* The quotations at the beginning of the Epistle show the Lord's association with His people collectively: the quotation at the end, His presence with each one individually. Alas we may not always be consciously with Him; but He would have us to know that He is with us.

Also Jacob had the assurance of the Lord's support, for He said, *"I . . . will keep thee in all places whither thou goest."*

In like manner the Epistle to the Hebrews very blessedly unfolds to us the priestly grace of the Lord that supports us in our journey through this world. The Lord, at the top of the ladder, is keeping His feeble, failing saints at the bottom of the ladder. In **Hebrews 7**, we learn that the One who is made higher than the heavens *"ever liveth"* for those who are on their way to heaven. It is true that the man at the bottom should ever live for the One at the top of the ladder, even as Paul could say, *"For me to live is Christ;"* but while we oftentimes fail to live for Him, He never ceases to live for us.

Further the Epistle unfolds the effect of the Lord, at the top of the ladder, living for the man at the bottom.

FIRST, from **Hebrews 2**, we learn that He can help us in our temptations, and, that He does so as One who Himself has suffered being tempted. To resist the temptation involves suffering. The

Lord, when tempted would rather suffer than yield to the temptation; and now, in the moments of our temptation, He is able to help us to suffer rather than sin by giving way to the temptation.

AGAIN we learn from **Hebrews 4: 15** that He feels for us in our infirmities. He is not unmoved by what His people suffer from the weakness of the body, for He has not only known temptation, but He has known weariness, and hunger and thirst.

ALSO He intercedes for us according to His perfect knowledge of our needs. Thus we have the support of One who, not only lives, but *"ever liveth"*; and ever living He is able to save us to the uttermost — until earth's journey ends in heaven's glory, and time is closed by eternity.

Then the Lord told Jacob He would bring him into the Land that He had given him. So in the Epistle to the Hebrews we learn that not only has the Lord secured the glory for His people, but very soon He is going to bring His people into the glory, as we read, He is *"bringing many sons to glory;"* and it is but a *"little while,"* and we shall reach that glory; for *"yet a very little while, and He that shall come will come; and will not tarry"* (**Hebrews 10: 37**).

FINALLY, just as Jacob is assured that the Lord will be faithful to His word — that what He says He will do — so again and again we are assured of the immutability of God's Word. In **Hebrews 1**, we are told that God has spoken in the Son: in **Hebrews 2** we are warned that if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, how much more the word of the Son. In **Hebrews 6: 16-18** we learn that God has not only spoken but confirmed His Word by His oath, and the Word and the oath are spoken of as two immutable things. Then, in **Hebrews 12**, we have the solemn warning that when God speaks, His word comes to pass, even to the shaking and removal of man's kingdom and the bringing in of the everlasting Kingdom that

cannot be moved. And we are reminded that if God has spoken we can with the utmost confidence rely upon what God has said.

(Hebrews 13: 5, 6)

Thus, in the Epistle to the Hebrews we have a Christian interpretation of Jacob's dream.

The Epistle opens by presenting Christ in the glory. It goes on to tell us who this glorious Person is, for of Him we read, "*Thou remainest*" and "*Thou art the same.*"

With the passing of time others pass away, and with the changing years others change; in Christ in the glory we have found One who will never pass away and will never change.

Then, as the Epistle proceeds, we learn the gracious work that Christ is accomplishing; He is bringing many sons to glory, and as He brings them on their way, He succours them in their temptations, He feels for them in their infirmities, and He intercedes for them in their needs. He represents us in heaven, before the face of God, and in a "*very little while*" He is coming to receive us into glory.

Thus we learn where Christ is, who Christ is, what He is doing, and what He will yet do in a very little while. How blessed then the position of the man at the bottom of the ladder, if walking in the light of the glorious Man at the top.

Little Flock #79 Appendix A. P. Cecil

1. Our great High Priest is sitting
At God's right hand above,
For us His hands uplifting,
In sympathy and love:
Whilst here below, in weakness,
We onward speed our way;
In sorrow oft and sickness,
We sigh and groan and pray.
2. Through manifold temptation,
My soul holds on her course,
Christ's mighty intercession
Alone is her resource;
My gracious High Priest's pleadings,
Who on the cross did bleed,
Bring down God's grace and blessings,
Help in each hour of need.
3. Oh, Jesus, blessed Saviour,
We hope to see Thee soon,
Who once on earth didst suffer,
Who soon for us wilt come;
'Twas God's most gracious favour,
That gave His Son to die
To live our Intercessor,
To plead for us on high.