

“JACOB AND ANGELS”

He took his brother by the heel in the womb, And in his strength he struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; He wept, and sought favor from Him. He found Him in Bethel, And there He spoke to us- That is, the LORD God of hosts. The LORD is His memorable name. (Hosea 12:3-5 NKJV)

And He [Jesus] said to him [Nathaniel], "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." (John 1:51 NKJV)

Jacob was not the type of person you would think God would pick to be the father and the namesake of His chosen people. Jacob coerced his brother into selling his birthright. He deceived his father into giving him the blessings intended for Esau. There are many other reasons Jacob did not deserve God's favor. Grace is favor from the Lord which is not deserved.

John Newton who wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace" as well as many other hymns, was a man who, in many ways, was like Jacob. When he was old and could no longer read, he heard someone read I Corinthians 15:10 – "By the grace of God I am what I am." John Newton was silent for a time and then said, "I am not what I ought to be. Ah! How imperfect and deficient. I am not what I might be, considering my privileges and opportunities. I am not what I wish to be. God knows my heart – knows I wish to be like Him. I am not what I hope to be. Before long, I will drop this clay tabernacle, to be like Him and see Him as He is! Yet, I am not what I once was – a child of sin, and slave of the devil! Though not all these – not what I ought to be, not what I might be, not what I wish or hope to be, and not what I once was, I think I can truly say with the apostle, "By the grace of God – I am what I am!" When John Newton died his tombstone had the epitaph he'd written for it:

"John Newton, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy!"

1.) Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. 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. 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. (Genesis 28:10-12 NKJV)

Esau was the first-born son of Isaac and Rebekah. The twins Esau and Jacob were quite different persons. Esau was an outdoorsman. Jacob was a homebody. Esau was his father's favorite; Jacob was indulged by Rebekah. He had obtained the rights of a first born from Esau in a lopsided bargain. When Isaac thought he was near death, he wanted to give his blessings to Esau. Jacob and his mother conspired to deceive Isaac. Jacob received the blessings. Esau was furious and swore to take his revenge. Jacob fled for his life under the guise of seeking a wife in the family of Rebekah's kin.

It was on the first night after he fled the family home in Beersheba that Jacob had a dream of a ladder set up on earth and reaching to heaven with angels of God ascending and descending on it. More amazing:

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. "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. "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."

(Genesis 28:13-15 NKJV)

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." 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!" (Genesis 28:16-17 NKJV)

When Jacob awoke, he took the stone he had used as a pillow, stood it upright, poured oil on it and called the place. "house of God".

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, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. 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." (Genesis 28:20-22)

Notice that his vow begins "If God will be with me..." and that it takes the form of a bargain with God. His vow lacked both faith and reverence.

2.) Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has acquired all this wealth." And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed it was not favorable toward him as before. Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you." So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock, and said to them, "I see your father's countenance, that it is not favorable toward me as before; but the God of my father has been with me. (Genesis 31:1-5 NKJV)

Jacob reached the home of Laban, the brother of his mother Rebekah, in Haran. He soon went to work for Laban tending sheep. When the question of wages came up, Jacob agreed to work seven years as the bride price for Laban's daughter Rachel. Laban was as devious as Jacob. After seven years laboring for the right to marry the woman he loved, Laban switched daughters on the wedding night and Jacob was married to Leah. He then had to work another seven years for Rachel. The question of wages came up again. Laban said that Jacob could keep the speckled sheep as his hire. Ten times Laban changed what sheep Jacob could keep. However he would change their arrangement, Jacob prospered and Laban boiled within. "Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, 'Jacob.' And I said, 'Here I am.' "And He said, 'Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flocks are streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. 'I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.'" Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? "Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money. "For all these riches which God has taken from our father are really ours and our children's; now then, whatever God has said to you, do it." Then Jacob rose and set his sons and his wives on camels. And he carried away all his livestock and all his possessions which he had gained, his acquired livestock which he had gained in Padan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan. (Genesis 31:11-18 NKJV)

Jacob left when Laban was a distance away shearing his sheep. Rachel stole Laban's household idols. Three days later Laban heard about the departure of Jacob and his household. He pursued them with a company of men. The night before he overtook Jacob's family and herds, God appeared to Laban in a dream and said, "I'm warning you – leave Jacob alone."

3.) With God's warning restraining Laban, Jacob and Laban met, Laban said his farewells to his daughters and their children and he and Jacob swore to an oath of peace, "May the Lord watch between you and me while we are absent one from another."

So Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is God's camp." And he called the name of that place Mahanaim. (Genesis 32:1-2 NKJV)

With the threat of Laban and his company of men behind him, Jacob now faced a greater threat before him. Jacob had fled from his home over twenty years before to escape Esau's threat of revenge. Esau was on his way toward Jacob's family and herds accompanied by four hundred men. The angels of God who met him were meant to reassure him. Jacob's fear prompted him to pray perhaps the most sincere prayer of his life:

Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you': "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies. "Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children. "For You said, 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'" (Genesis 32:9-12 NKJV)

Jacob then did all that he could humanly do. He sent a gift to Esau of 540 livestock in three herds as a peace offering. He divided his family into two groups so that if one group was attacked, the other group might get away. He sent his family and all his possessions across the Jabbok River.

Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." (Genesis 32:24-28 NKJV)

And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Just as he crossed over Peniel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip. (Genesis 32:30-31 NKJV)

Then Jacob and Esau met and parted as friends. Eventually, Jacob returned to his father Isaac. When Isaac died, Jacob and Esau buried him.