

Jacob's Response

Read: Genesis 35:1-15, John 1:29-51

H/N 28/12/03 pm

Genesis: 28:18-22

Psalms: 116:1-7, 66:8-14, 66:15-20, 116:17-19

Jacob was fleeing murderous threats from his brother Esau when he stopped for the night to sleep in the open field. He took a stone and put it at his head for protection. That night the Lord spoke to him in a powerful dream. He awoke in fear, but in no doubt that it was the Lord who had spoken to him – *surely the Lord is in this place*.

In his dream he saw into heaven itself. It was as if the heavens had opened and the Lord came down. Apostle John also had a powerful vision described in the book of Revelation. In Rev 4 he says *I looked and behold a door standing open in heaven*. He was taken up to see into the heavenly throne room and beheld the One seated on the throne.

Jacob's dream was not a normal dream. There is no precedent here for understanding all dreams as the voice of the Lord and trying to give them some theological meaning. There are those who believe such things. But such people must remember that in these last days the Lord has come down and spoken through his Son Jesus Christ. We have his words in the Scriptures – so let us listen and take heed to his words rather than searching the meaning of dreams.

We turn this evening to Jacob's response to that dream in which he saw a ladder/staircase reaching from earth to heaven.

Set up a pillar

Jacob rose early in the morning and did an interesting thing – though not so unusual. *He took the stone by his head, set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it*. He did this as an act of worship. His father Isaac, and Grandfather Abraham responded to appearances of the Lord by building an altar. Jacob's action can be seen as a similar response.

'Moses does not mean that the stone was made an idol, but that it should be a special memorial'. (Jean Calvin). He was not conforming to some pagan ritual but was setting up a silent witness that the Lord had spoken to him in this place. Later (Leviticus 26:1) the Lord did declare that sacred pillars were not to be set up in the land.

Gave a name – Bethel

Jacob gave an appropriate and meaningful name to this place where the Lord spoke to him. He called this place Bethel, meaning 'house of God'. The naming was probably associated with the anointing of the stone pillar.

The naming symbolized possession of the land – one aspect of the promise just given by the Lord. When a nation gains its freedom or when it is overrun by another nation place names are often changed.

The name Bethel was also part of the vow that Jacob made – vs. 22. He vowed that he

would make this place the house of God when he returned from this journey.

Vow

Jacob's response not only included worship and a naming ceremony, but also a vow. He made a solemn commitment to the Lord who had spoken to him.

We know that vows must not be taken rashly – as seen in the tragic case of Jephthah and his daughter (Judges 11). Yet we also note the vow that Hannah made in the time of distress. She vowed that if the Lord would give her a son to take away the stigma of being a barren woman that she would give him to the Lord all the days of his life. She made a vow within her means and she kept that vow to the glory of God.

Jacob made a vow in his time of distress – when he was alone and in need of food and clothing. He made a vow in response to the promise of the Lord. He made a vow within his means to fulfill. This vow was a means to strengthen his faith in the Lord.

There are three parts to the vow that Jacob made:

1. *If God will be with me and keep me and keep me in the way that I am going ...then the Lord shall be my God.* This is a conditional statement- *if ... then* – but cannot be regarded as bargaining with the Lord as many maintain. This is not the arrogance of a man trying to make a deal with Almighty God.

Jacob remember, awoke from his dream in fear. He was awe struck at what he had seen and heard. To respond by trying to make a deal with the Lord does not fit this scene. How then do we understand this vow that he makes?

Note that the conditional statement in this vow is taken from the promise the Lord had just given to him. He is not asking for anything beyond what the Lord has already promised. The Lord gave him this covenant promise and he is now responding with his own promise – a promise to make the Lord his own God. By faith he took the promise of the Lord and responded in this positive way. Jacob, who up till now spoke only of **your** God, the God of his father Isaac, was now ready to say **my** God.

This has been the vow, the promise, of many a young person leaving home and going off on their own into the world. The time had come for Jacob to make that decision. The Lord in his marvelous grace had come to Jacob. Jacob responded positively accepting the conditions of the covenant God. O that more young people leaving home and going off into the world would respond to the grace of God as Jacob did, rather than going the way of the world.

2. *This stone...shall be God's house.* Jacob vowed that this stone he had set up as a pillar will be made the house of God. It was not just a memorial stone but a stone of promise. In Genesis 35 we read how years later he went back with his family to this place at Bethel and built an altar to the Lord. He went there putting away foreign Gods and re-committed himself and his family to the Lord. Like the pile of stones that Joshua set up after crossing the Jordan (Joshua. 4), this stone pillar reminded not just Jacob but generations to come of how the Lord had revealed himself to Jacob, to Israel.

3. I will surely give a tenth to you. Jacob vowed to give to the Lord a tenth of all that the Lord gave him. Just as in many other ways Jacob followed in the footsteps of Abraham so here he responded as Abraham did to the grace of God. When God gave Abraham victory over the armies of four kings, he gave a tithe of all the plunder to the priest of God Most High (Genesis 14).

Just how Jacob would give his tenth to the Lord we are not told. At present he had little to give- the Lord had in fact promised to keep him and provide his needs. So this vow of Jacobs is an act of faith in itself – faith that the Lord would indeed keep him and bless him.

Jacob became Israel, the father of the nation and of the people of God. This principle of giving a tithe was established here by Jacob as the appropriate response of God's people to his blessing. It was not a demand from the Lord but the response of a man who knew the grace of God. Do we know such grace, the grace that abounds to us in Jesus Christ such that we respond with such giving to the Lord?

Let us remember that it is the Lord who has given us everything we have in the first place. Jacob said *of all that you give me I will give you a tenth*. We must recognize that all we have is the gift of God not the result of our hard work or cleverness.

So Jacob responded to the promise of the Lord in worship. He would remember this awesome experience and share it with others by building the house of the Lord. He embraced the covenant promise of the Lord in a personal way by taking a vow before the Lord – a vow to build up the house of God and give a tenth to the Lord. Do we too quickly forget the grace of God shown to us in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Fulfillment

Before leaving this narrative of Jacob's ladder, turn to the New Testament and John 1:51. There you will find Jesus made reference to this dream as he spoke to Nathaniel. Nathaniel was amazed at the supernatural powers demonstrated by Jesus. But Jesus promised him that he would see even greater things. He promised Nathaniel that he would see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

In this clear reference to Jacobs dream, Jesus puts himself in the position of fulfilling this dream or vision. Heaven has opened and God has come down to dwell among men. Angels, messengers of God, come and go upon the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. He is the Word become flesh, the living word of God. Nathaniel and you and I are wonderfully blessed for in Jesus Christ we have something more awesome and wonderful than even the dream of Jacob. *He who has seen me has seen the Father* said Jesus.

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