

Rebekah had previously resorted to devious means to assure herself Jacob, not Esau, would receive Isaac's blessing. Despite the threat to her favored son that emerged from that effort she reverted again to subtlety, this time to preserve him from Esau's threatened murderous vengeance. It seemed to be in her blood. Jacob was soon to learn her brother Laban was worse, much worse (although it seemed to be in Jacob's blood too so he likely didn't yet even recognize it for what it was).

So his parents called him and sent him on his way presumably to seek a more suitable bride in Rebekah's home town, Haran,. This was a long, long hike, about 1400 miles across a no-man's land. It is now called the "fertile crescent" because it has climate and soil that can support crops and herds. It arcs across the middle east linking the Mediterranean with the Persian Gulf. Haran was a major junction and trading center on the main route between India and Egypt, in what is now northwestern Iraq. It occupied what has been termed "the cradle of civilization" as recorded in Genesis 10 & 11.

Did Jacob set out on foot alone? Wouldn't his wealthy parents have provided an escort with food and other provisions to assist him and protect him along the way? Abraham had sent his servant there with ten camels and some drivers to seek a bride for Isaac. But there is no record of companions in this chapter. Isaac didn't send him away without confirming his original blessing to Jacob. There would be no doubt of its validity and application to Jacob, despite the shady circumstances by which it had been obtained.

Jacob's first overnight stop was a place by a Canaanite city named Luz, renamed Bethel by Jacob. While sleeping there, on the ground with a stone for a pillow, he experienced a marvelous vision. This story is familiar to children in Sunday School but it provides some significant insights into God's purposes and the state of Jacob's soul. God treated Jacob to a wonderful dream with a vision of a staircase between heaven and earth with angels ascending and descending and God himself at the top. (I recall wishing as a child I could see Him. Still do.) We do not have such detailed descriptions of the appearances of God to Abraham and Isaac, but they were truly visible manifestations not just dreams. Had Jacob's attitude put him at a greater distance from God than his father's? If so, God was going to draw him closer over the next few decades. Meanwhile, we realize Rebekah would never see her favored son again on this earth.

In the dream God largely repeated the blessings He had already personally given Abraham and Isaac, bestowing them upon Jacob. But Jacob seemed to have a mind-set that could not comprehend receiving and accepting anything as a free, undeserved gift (grace). If there were no strings attached, he would attach some of his own. Self had to earn (if not swindle/steal) what he wanted. "Such a deal I've made!" For much of his life he truly lived up to the name he was given when he was born grasping the heel of his

brother, Jacob, "supplanter," the brother with whom he had contended even before birth. Watch for references to this character of Jacob among his descendants in the history and prophecies in scripture. For example see Hosea 12. Note: Jesus was not like that!

Psalm 69:4 *then I restored that which I took not away.*

Upon awakening Jacob immediately turned God's totally free gift into a transaction complete with a vow. Yet God Himself had already vowed all the future blessings to his father Abraham. Now compare God's unconditional gift with Jacob's transaction and its added conditions and the promises he made. How typical of the heart of man—pridefully insisting upon having a part in his salvation. How many die in their sins! But what does Paul say?

Ephesians 2:4 *But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: 7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

Comparing Jacob's responses with God's blessings one can readily note that God's promises are gratis with no strings attached. But Jacob's responses were propositional and not always quite in sync with God's blessings. Jacob attempted to strike a bargain with God instead of simply accepting God's free gift. He was even so presumptuous as to vow to God. Isn't this the story of man's heart? Wanting to claim a role in establishing the terms of his relationship with Him he turned God's "I will" into man's "If you will, I will." Jacob characteristically desired to be a self made man and to be that by outwitting, or outbargaining his those that have to do with him. Even God.

The dream itself, picturing angels ascending and descending between earth and heaven, was prophetic of a yet future link between men in heaven and men on earth, an insight Jacob's ancestors were not given. The Lord announces this future link to Nathaniel in the first days of His public ministry on earth.

John 1:51 *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.*

It is further described as a millennial blessing.

Revelation 21:24 *And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. 25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. 26 And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it.* As Christ reigns over the earth, and we with Him, He will travel back and forth visiting and administering justice and blessing to its population for 1000 years. Be with Him