



Light from the Word

The Faith of Jacob

Theme verse: *“By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.”*¹

Jacob had weaknesses that caused him many difficulties and struggles throughout his spiritual journey. Nevertheless, as we study the biblical accounts concerning him, it is evident that his faith emerged victorious in the end. As Jacob's faith grew he left us numerous lessons to apply to our own growth in faith.

Jacob and his brother Esau were twins born to Isaac and Rebekah. Although Esau was the first-born and should have inherited a double portion, he evidently did not hold his privilege in high esteem; he sold it to his brother Jacob for a bowl of stew. When Isaac was approaching death and ready to pass on the final blessings to his sons, Jacob, with the encouragement of his mother, acquired the blessing intended for Esau by deceiving his father Isaac.

Ostensibly, Jacob and his mother were successful in their endeavor. However, Jacob did not receive the blessing because of his deception. That which God had promised would have been given to Jacob if he and his mother had only possessed the faith to trust Him patiently. (Note David's faith

in waiting on God)². God had already revealed His intentions to Rebekah regarding her two sons, *“And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger”*³. Their lack of belief at this point in their lives was in direct contrast to the exemplary faith of Jacob's grandfather Abraham, *“He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform”*⁴. Jacob was soon to learn that interfering with God's delivery of His promises only brought trouble and sorrow upon him.

As a result of his dishonesty, Jacob was forced to leave his family to avoid Esau's threats. His father sent him to Padanaram, a daunting distance of over 400 miles through wilderness country. On the way, he had an amazing vision, *“And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it”*⁵. During the dream, he received the wonderful promise, *“And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham*

*thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of”*⁶.

Jacob's response to this experience reveals his growing faith: *“And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee”*⁷. In doing so, Jacob had established a covenant with God by promising to serve Him after God first promised to keep him and be with him wherever he went. Furthermore, Jacob vowed to give tithes of all that God gave him, much as his grandfather Abraham did unto the priest Melchizedek.

Jacob did eventually find his way to Padanaram and

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subsequently to the house of Laban, his mother's brother. Jacob served Laban for twenty years; fourteen to marry his two daughters and six more for his cattle. Laban and Jacob had a very strained relationship. Laban changed his wages frequently, and despite that, Jacob acquired much of Laban's flocks and herds. At length, God told Jacob, "... Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee"⁸.

As Jacob began his journey homeward, he was met by angelic messengers, and subsequently sent his own messengers to Esau, seeking mercy. Upon the messenger's return, he was greatly alarmed to learn that his brother was coming to meet him with four-hundred men. Fearing the worst, Jacob first sought God in earnest prayer, and then prepared a gift of livestock with the hope of appeasing Esau's wrath. That night, Jacob had yet another awe-inspiring experience. An angel of God appeared to him, and he wrestled all night with the angel

until receiving the blessing he desired. Because of his persistence, the angel changed his name from Jacob to Israel, "*And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob (Supplanter), but Israel (Prince of God): for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed*"⁹. In essence, God was telling Jacob, "*Because thou hast power with God, thou shalt also prevail with men*". His faith renewed, Jacob met his brother with miraculous results, "*And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept*"¹⁰.

When facing his many struggles, Jacob learned to seek a close fellowship with God¹¹, and his faith grew until he was transformed into a chosen instrument of the Lord. In fulfillment of God's earlier promise, Jacob's sons became the twelve tribes of Israel, "*All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them*"¹². In addition, Jesus referred to Jacob very favorably in the New Testament, "*And I say unto you, That many shall come from the*

east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven"¹³.

Finally, many consider Jacob's prophecy of the "Prince of Peace" descending from his son Judah as the culmination of his faith, "*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be*"¹⁴. In like manner as Jacob, we can overcome in our own trials by consistently seeking God's help and grace through faith. We can also experience a lifelong journey of growing in faith as we diligently pursue God.¹⁵

Endnotes:

¹ Hebrews 11:21

² 1 Samuel 24:10

³ Genesis 25:23

⁴ Romans 4:20-21

⁵ Genesis 28:12

⁶ Genesis 28:13-15

⁷ Genesis 28:20-22

⁸ Genesis 31:3

⁹ Genesis 32:28

¹⁰ Genesis 33:4

¹¹ James 4:8

¹² Genesis 49:28

¹³ Matthew 8:11

¹⁴ Genesis 49:10

¹⁵ Hebrews 11:6