

JACOB'S LADDER... A Way to God

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Poor Jacob! He had become a wanderer far from home; he had stolen his brother's birthright; he had gained everything only to lose it again. Even the stars in the sky seemed unsympathetic. He had lost a mother, his father had been deceived; his brother Esau was outraged and threatening murder. Perhaps Jacob regretted his actions, but there was no possibility of turning back; he had, so to speak, burned his bridges! Somewhere beyond the horizon he might find people, but the prospect was not pleasing. A stranger in a foreign land would need friends, food, employment and a home in which to stay. The coveted birthright was poor compensation for the misery of his soul.

He was weary, every part of his body ached. His tired feet were burning from the long walk across the hot sands. Perhaps he found a small desert bush which offered shelter from the chilling winds, and, gathering stones as a pillow, the distracted man lay down to sleep, not caring if he would ever awaken. The poor fellow did not know Jehovah had watched every step he had taken that day, and even the angels were aware of his plight. "And he dreamed and beheld a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven

The Ladder Was Surprising.. . It led to God

Anything Jacob knew about God was merely intellectual. His father and grandfather believed in Jehovah, and that knowledge had been shared with the fugitive. Yet he had never enjoyed fellowship with God, and he desired things which were prohibited. Doubtless, he was clever, shrewd and resourceful, but apart from personal pleasure, Jacob was another man destined to learn the hard way. It was therefore surprising when he discovered God had great interest in him, and had arranged something special to open his eyes. There was another world beyond human horizons where God reigned, and earthly treasures were unimportant. Jacob's ancestors had known about Jehovah, but apparently this was his first contact with the Almighty. He was still far short of what God required, and infinitely below what he might have been. Yet he would be unable

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to deny the existence of Jehovah for he had heard His voice. The Lord had approached the runaway deceiver, and He was determined to change Jacob into the man he needed to become.

When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, God sought them. Centuries later the Good Shepherd came to redeem undeserving people. God is always the Seeker, but it was significant that Jacob described the place as dreadful. Evidently he was uncomfortable in the presence of the Lord; much had to be accomplished within him.

The Ladder Was Sufficient... It went all the way!

and the top of it reached to heaven." Obviously only God could provide such access into His presence. Earlier, when the inhabitants of earth spoke one language, the people decided they would bridge the gap between earth and heaven; between time and eternity. "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name.. ." (Gen. 11:14). Those early builders had great ambitions but little intelligence. Apparently they disliked interference from heaven, and were determined to overthrow the authority of Jehovah. Their plans and ambitions were never completed, for God confounded the builders.

Many people in various ages tried to find a way into the

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presence of God, but their efforts always failed. Probably the most ardent were the Jews, who endeavored to create a religious and moral stairway to heaven. Their accomplishments always fell short of their need. John Bunyan described a man who entered the highway to heaven by climbing over a wall. The fellow avoided passing the Cross by taking a short cut into the highway of Grace. He appeared to be as safe as the Christian, for they traveled together. Unfortunately, his effort was insufficient to meet his need, for at the entrance to heaven he was rejected. His ladder was too short!

The Ladder Was Special... It was the only one of its kind! Jacob never saw a second ladder, there was only one way into the Divine Presence. Centuries later, Jesus of Nazareth said to Nathaniel: "Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig

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tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these. 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" (John 1:50-51). Christ was the true Jacob's ladder, the means by which angels ascended and descended from heaven. Furthermore, He insisted that there was no other means of approaching God. He said: ".... I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Simon Peter preached identical truth when he said: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The Lord expressed the same truth when He said: "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9). Sheepfolds had one door where the shepherd protected his flock.

During the history of the church, strange doctrines have been taught by opponents of the faith. It has been said that as there are twelve gates by which people enter the Holy City (Rev. 21:12), so there are many ways to come to God. The Hindus, the Moslems and other religions of the world have their idea of reaching the Hereafter, but as long as they reach their goal, it is unimportant how they get there. This is a contradiction of the teachings of Christ. The Savior insisted He was the only way by which to approach the Almighty. Many people dislike this interpretation, but it must be remembered: Jesus taught this; it is not a figment of human imagination. If unevangelized people of other nations safely reach an eternal home with God, why should the church spend incalculable wealth, time and energy taking the gospel message to those who have never heard? There is only one way to heaven, and people who travel by any other road will never reach their goal.

The Ladder Was Select... It was used only by Angels!

Jacob saw the ladder but never used it! Certain questions within his mind were answered during that memorable night, but one remained. He knew there was a God; that the Almighty ruled in heaven; that His promises made to the fathers were

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reliable. He realized that in spite of his indiscretions, the mercy of God was being extended in his direction. Yet, he did not know how he could climb the ladder into the presence of God. The dream indicated angels possessed a privilege denied to sinful men.

Many years later, Elijah appeared to have overcome that

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problem. "And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2 Kings 2:11). That was a definite improvement on what Jacob had seen earlier. To enter into the presence of God was now possible for God's servants. Unfortunately, Elijah had become a disappointment. His fear of Jezebel had undermined his faith in the preserving power of Jehovah. He could never again minister effectively to the people of Israel. The prophet did not climb a ladder, he was given a resplendent carriage in which to ride.

The Savior described how a beggar "was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom," whereas "the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell, he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom" (Luke 16:22-23). It was remarkable that the beggar entered into eternal bliss, but the wealthy sinner did not. All these facts were extremely interesting, but they never answered the question "How can sinners find the ladder, the chariot or any other transportation into the presence of God?"

That answer was supplied during the crucifixion of Jesus. Luke described how a guilty thief looked at Christ and prayed: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily, I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:42-43). The patriarch saw a ladder, the thief saw something more comprehensive. The cross pointed to heaven; reached down to earth; and two arms reached out to welcome everybody. Christ is all the human soul needs. To receive a visit from Him is to enjoy life's greatest privileges. Miss Henderson was reading on the veranda of the Dufferin Hospital in India, when a high-class Hindu woman came up the steps to ask for an interview. As the missionary rose to wel-

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come her, a copy of Holman Hunt's picture of Christ knocking upon a closed door fell out of her book. The visitor picked it up, and looking at it, said, "Tell me about this." Her request was granted and after hearing the gospel, the lady went away.

The following winter when snow was on the mountains, the missionary went to visit the woman. As she approached the house she saw the door was wide open, and the physical needs of the woman troubled her. She was a trained nurse, and said: "You should not have your door open. The mountains are covered with snow, and it is cold." The lady replied: "I know it. I have seen the snow, and have felt the cold, but I thought perhaps your Jesus might pass by, and I wanted Him to find the door wide open!" (Quoted from One Hundred Great Texts and Their Treatment by F. M. Barton, page 299).

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