

## 38. I will let You be my God, if you do this...

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Someone says, "God, if You just let me get out of this jam, I will start to go to church every Sunday." Or "God, if You let me win this lottery, I will give 20% to the church." Or "Lord, if You allow me to marry that beautiful woman, I will be Your servant." Or "Oh God, don't let the cops find my pot in the trunk. I will do anything." By the way, the last comment was the actual comment made by a drug dealer who got pulled over for suspicion of drug trafficking. His comment was recorded in the dashboard-mounted video camera while he was confined in the back of the police squad car. He didn't know he was being recorded.

Many people including ourselves have tried to make a deal with God while they were in their hot water. Maybe you are making one right now and that is the reason why you are here – to get some brownie points from God. You might attend church until you get what you want, after that you would say, "Going to church on Sunday morning? Are you kidding me? Don't you know there is a great line up of football and golf games on TV?"

If you are in the process of trying to make a deal with God or thinking about it, this message is for you.

### A. ISAAC'S BLESSING FOR JACOB

*Genesis 28:1-5 Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. 2 Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. 3 "May God Almighty bless you, And make you fruitful and multiply you, That you may be an assembly of peoples; 4 And give you the blessing of Abraham, To you and your descendants with you, That you may inherit the land In which you are a stranger, Which God gave to Abraham." 5 So Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Padan Aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.*

Perhaps now Isaac resigns himself to what his wife Rebekah told him was the Lord's will all along – that the older would serve the younger and that Jacob, not Esau, would receive the birthright. So he sent Jacob on with blessing and instructions.

It was essential that Jacob should not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan, as his brother Esau did. Jacob is the one who inherits the birthright and carries on the seed of the Messiah.

If you were to give the nationality of this family, you would have to say they were Syrians because that is what they are called in the Scriptures. Sometimes the question is asked, "Was Abraham a Jew? Was he an Israeli?" No, technically he was not. There were no Israelis until the time of Jacob whose name was changed to Israel. His twelve sons were Israelites.

Tragically, this is the last time Jacob will see his mother. Because he would spend the next 20 years of his life at the home of the master deceiver his uncle Laban. His mother Rebekah died during that time.

Though Jacob was raised with the covenant of God through his father, he personally has not experienced the relationship with God. Every man and woman comes to the point where he or she has to decide whether they are going to choose to follow God or not.

For Esau's case, he made it very clear from the beginning. He had nothing to do with God. You may know a few people around you, either at work or at home, who don't give a rip about God. Or you might be one of those who doesn't care. Today, you are going to face a decision that can change your eternal destination from hell to heaven or continue in the path of no hope all the way to hell.

Somehow we think that when Jacob was leaving his parents' home, he was in his early twenties. How wrong our guess is! He was a 77 years old single man. Some of you who are single, get your hope up. Your day is coming!!!

### **B. BROWNY POINTS FOR ESAU TOO?**

*Genesis 28:6-9 Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," 7 and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Padan Aram. 8 Also Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac. 9 So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had.*

All of sudden now the blessing and the birthright seem important to Esau. They were important enough to him that he tried to impress his father by marrying a non-Canaanite woman when he saw that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother. Perhaps he thought that this would qualify him to receive some kind of blessing from God, but it only added to the irritation in the home.

### **C. GOD AND JACOB AT BETHEL**

*Genesis 28:10-12 Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11 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. 12 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.*

Jacob traveled about 40 miles from Beersheba to Bethel. The fear, the loneliness – the first time away from his mama and daddy, the isolation, the excitement, and the anticipation. This was an absolutely important time in Jacob's spiritual life.

In this desolated wilderness, Jacob had a significant, yet strange dream as he used a stone for a pillow which would make just about anyone have a strange dream. You've got to be extremely tired to use a stone as a pillow. I don't think that it was "My Pillow."

Jesus made this portion of Genesis 28 clear in John 1:51 that He is the access to heaven. He is the means by which heaven comes down to us and by which we can go to heaven. He is the "Ladder."

*John 1:51 And He said to him, "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."*

Jacob is a perfect picture of the lost soul – in the darkness, fleeing for his life, burdened with sin, and ignorant of the fact that God is near him and wants to save him. The ladder pictures Christ as the only way from earth to heaven.

*John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*

Jesus opens heaven for us and brings heaven's blessings to our lives. And He alone can take us to heaven. Jacob thought he was in a lonely wilderness and awakened to discover he had been at the very gate of heaven.

God was meeting Jacob when he felt lonely. He was telling Jacob to have a heavenly perspective. Jacob tried to steal the blessings from his brother Esau with everything he had. He didn't know that the real blessing was waiting for him: God Himself.

A side note before we go any further:

- **No angel worship:** It is completely unbiblical to do angel worship. They are mere messengers, not God. There is only one who is worthy of our praise and worship, it ain't saint, nor angel. It is Jesus. I find many New Age people in Sedona, AZ, Tucson, AZ, and Santa Fe, NM, even many Catholics get into angel worship. Stay far away from it.

#### **D. GOD'S ASSURANCE TO JACOB**

*Genesis 28:13-15 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. 14 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. 15 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."*

Essentially, God repeats to Jacob the terms of the covenant He gave to both Abraham and Isaac. Jacob had no doubt heard about the great God who appeared to his grandpa Abraham and his daddy Isaac, but now this same God has a personal encounter with Jacob himself. This was a life-changing experience for Jacob.

We, too, have the same assurance from God for us as Jacob had. God won't let us go until His work is complete in us.

*Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;*

#### **E. JACOB'S VOW AT BETHEL**

*Genesis 28:16-22 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." 17 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!" 18 Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. 19 And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously. 20 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, 21 so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. 22 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."*

Jacob was right in sensing the presence of the Lord there. However, he was wrong in thinking God was in one place and nowhere else. Our God is omnipresent that means He is everywhere at the same time.

His experience that night not only changed Jacob, but it changed the name of the place where he slept. "Bethel" means "house of God." But Bethel would eventually become a high place, notorious for idolatrous sacrifice according to Hosea 10:15.

Setting up a pillar was an act of faith for Jacob. It was his way of dedicating himself to God. It is a wonderful thing that by faith a believer can turn a "pillow" into a "pillar".

Asahel Nettleton was a powerful evangelist in the 1800s; he was one of the preachers who spurred on the Second Great Awakening in America. It's said that when he preached, people could feel the presence of God come into their town. Dr. Noah Porter of Farmington, Connecticut, wrote of one of Nettleton's meetings, "The state of feeling which, at the time, pervaded the town, was interesting beyond description. There was no commotion; but a stillness in our very streets which forcibly impressed us with the conviction that in very deed, God was in this place."

We have constant access to God's presence because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. He bridged heaven and earth, and by His death and resurrection, we're reconciled to God through His blood. We can say, "Surely the Lord is in this place." Even when we can't sense His presence, we know by faith He is near.

God's presence is especially close to us in times of difficulty. He comes alongside to help us, and His presence carries us through every trial and trouble. Whether by feeling or by faith, don't doubt the nearness of God hovering around you and within you today.

Only Christ could build a bridge to God with only two pieces of wood – a vertical and a cross beam.

If Jacob stopped there, it would have been good. But he went on with his wheeling and dealing con-artist attitude toward God. Even though God already has given him a promise, yet he is still trying to make a deal with God, even promising God money if He makes good on His promise.

The way Jacob prayed, it was evident God's mere word was not enough for him. He had to see God performing miracles before he would believe. Are we the same way?

*Nahum 1:7 The Lord is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him.*

Do we believe these things before we see them?

Jacob sets the terms of his covenant with God. He is laying down the deal for the Lord, instead of humbly receiving what God said would be the deal. Obviously, Jacob isn't very submitted to God. God will teach him submission in a very tough situation, through the school of Hard Knocks where the principal is his uncle Laban.

God is gracious enough to not call off the whole deal when He saw such a carnal response from Jacob.

Is our God supposed to be impressed with deals we can offer to Him? He owns everything in the universe, our money came from Him, He is the One who sustains our lives and gives breath each moment. So what do we have to offer Him that He would be so impressed to make a deal with us? Do you see how absurd this idea of wheeling and dealing with God is? How much better if we simply trust our faithful God with everything in our lives!

### **F. APPLICATION**

**When we have a prayer request to our God, we must come to Him with humility, thanksgiving, and request, not scheming as if we can fool Him.**

*Philippians 4:6-7 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*