

Hebrews 11:21
“Jacob journey up the ladder of faith”

- I. Introduction**
- II. Vs. 21a If God be with me**
- III. Vs. 21b Two for the price of one**

I. Introduction

Though Jacob’s illustration by the writer of Hebrews is only one verse and one example of faith it is safe to assume that the readers would have been fully aware of their ancestor’s history. In many ways Jacob’s life was like his fathers Isaac’s as his spiritual journey had many ups and downs. There is no way this morning we could cover all 12 chapters dedicated to describing those ups and downs but it will be beneficial to examine two of those points that led up to the context of the passage found in Genesis 48:19-22.

II. Vs. 21a If God be with me

First place to start our examination of Jacob would be in Gen. 28:16-22. There in verses 16-22 we read that Jacob wakes up at Bethel after fleeing his brother Esau and he knows that the Lord has spoken to him but is unsure what it all means. Though not directly related to our text this morning I can’t help but notice that Jacob’s experience here on what he calls “Bethel” the “House of God” ought to be same for all those who seek its refuge at any church:

- A. It ought to be a place where every runaway sinner can collapse upon the Rock of Christ and find rest.
- B. It ought to be a place where God’s children can come and be face to face with their “Ladder” Jesus and worship Him for truly He is in every place that has room for Him in their heart!

Of further interest to me and our spiritual journey is that Jacob makes a pillar and takes a vow in Genesis 28:20-22, but he starts this vow with ***“IF God will be with me..”*** It will

take 20 years of heartaches before Jacob will make it back to this spot and remove all the “**IF’S**”. But at least as he made this vow Jacob saw the fact that apart from the Lord’s hand he will not see what God has promised him. Jacob promises to give freely a 10th of all that the Lord gives him and in so doing Jacob is saying that his heart, home, and treasure are all God’s.

But we have got to realize the difference of God’s promise to that of Jacob’s vow as well:

God’s promise in Genesis 28:13-15:

- **I am** the LORD God
- **I will** give to you and your descendants
- **I am** with you and will keep you wherever you go
- **I will** not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you

Jacob’s vow in Genesis 28:20-22:

- **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
- **So that I come back** to my father's house in peace
- **Then the LORD shall be my God**

The contrast couldn’t be more obvious as God’s vow was unconditional and Jacob’s was conditional upon God keeping and giving so that he could come back to his father’s house.

Starting in chapter 29 of Genesis and continuing over the next three chapters, 40 years of the life of Jacob is looked at and what we see is a “**pilgrims process**” as the Lord works on his heart! The tool of choice is a man like Jacob, his uncle Laban. What interests me is the timing of the 29th chapter as it is right after Jacob had a personal encounter with the Lord. That encounter was so powerful that upon his death bed in chapter 48:3 he refers to it saying, “*God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me*”.

These next 20 years were the beginning of God taking Jacob to school and his teacher was Laban. In Genesis 29:1-2 with the words “*Jacob went on his journey*” we realize that Jacob was on a journey where he would find more of the Lord in his life and less of Jacob. Through out this section of Jacob’s life we see that: **Disobedience does not**

thwart God’s plan for his life but it did greatly effect how much Jacob would enjoy

it! Jacob had spent the night upon the rock and where he gained a new direction and hope. He was no longer walking alone he had a constant companion in God, who had just told him that *“I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.”* (28:15) The 450 mile, 15-day journey was with a light step because he had a light heart. In Genesis 29:3-6 we realize that there were no road signs saying *“325 miles to Laban’s house”* as Jacob has to ask if he is in the right place. The well was for by permit and only when all other livestock were present so as none could get the upper hand and over water their herds. And Jacob asks these shepherds, *“Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?”* For the next 20 years Jacob would know him as well. Jacob’s interest in coming to Laban was to find a bride from among his own relatives. And in verses 7-8 even though Jacob is 77 years old and Rachael is most likely quite a bit younger he spies the one he has been searching for his whole life in Rachael. But as we know the rest of the story it will many years before he can enjoy this bride. Next we fast forward 20 years to Genesis 32:21-26 and specifically verses 21-23 where Jacob sends the presents over in waves; then at night sends his wives and children over the river Jabbok which means “wrestler”. The river is about 25 miles from where they camped and was only 30 feet wide and waste deep. This left Jacob all-alone with only himself and his fears.

In verse 24-25 we notice the wording as it was a Man that wrestled with Jacob and not the other way around. We are given two clues as to the identity of this Holy Grappler:

- a. Vs. 30 *“I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”* Clearly Jacob believes that the Man who wrestled with him was God.
- b. Hosea 12:3-5 *“He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and in his strength he struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; He wept, and sought favor from Him. He found Him in Bethel, and there He spoke to us; that is, the LORD God of hosts. The LORD is His memorable name.”*

Then in Genesis 32:25-26 we see three ways Jacob obtained spiritual victory:

1. Vs. 25 **Recognize our own inadequacy**: It appeared from Jacob’s perspective that he and the Lord were pretty evenly matched but that was in appearance

only. Amazingly we wonder how Jacob was able to keep up his strength until day break but when we consider ourselves many of us have been wrestling with the Lord over areas of our lives for years. When the Lord just touched Jacob's hip he was completely defeated and helpless. Notice that it says that the Lord "did not prevail" not that He "could not prevail". **That means that God wanted to take the "fight" out of Jacob and get him to quit trying to do things in his own strength.** Jacob obtained spiritual victory the moment he was at the end of himself, when we realized the futility of using his own strength to obtain what can only be his when we trusted God. It's interesting that it was Jacob's hip because when the hip is out of place a person can not stand. Paul would say in 1 Cor 10:12 "*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*"

2. Vs. 26 **Trust only in what God has promised:** Jacob only asked for what the Lord had promised to bless him. It was God's word that Jacob wanted to claim, nothing more.
3. Vs. 26 **Held onto to God:** Jacob had come to the end of himself, he was hopeless and helpless. So he did what we all must do: **Cling to the Lord. He was finally totally dependent upon the Lord and had only taken 90 years to get there. Saint's like Jacob it's essential that we come to the place where we are conquered and broken by the Lord.** Jacob now knew practically what he knew intellectually: **That God was mightier than he.** Hosea 12:4 tells us that Jacob sought God's blessing as "He wept"! **That means that because he was defeated it was when he had lost that he won!**

III. Vs. 21b Two for the price of one

With those two brief texts as a background to Jacob we now come to the scripture of the event mentioned by the author of Hebrews which is found in Genesis 48:1-22. The story started out in that chapter in verses 1 where Joseph is told that his father is sick and that his time on earth is drawing to a close. Finally, the death that Jacob had so frequently spoke had opened its door for him, so Joseph takes his two sons to say farewell to their grandfather. We know that based upon chapter 41:50 that Manasseh and Ephraim were not small boys by this time as they were born before the first year of the famine and Jacob had been in Egypt some 17 years so these two boys were in their 20's. In verses 2-7 Jacob gathers his strength and reminisces about his life which was centered around one place and two great events. The first great event involved a place, Bethel:

- a. Vs. 3 “*God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me*”: Luz is also known as Bethel and it was here that God appeared to Jacob three times.
1. First in 28:10-17 when he was fleeing his brother Esau after stealing his birthright.
 2. The second time was as he was coming back into the land leaving behind his uncle Laban. It was here that he wrestled with the Lord & was given a new name.
 3. The third time in 35:9-12 as he was leaving Shechem after his sons had killed the town in retaliation for the rape of Dinah.

Each of these three times God blessed him and promised to make him a great nation and tells him he would again possess the land of Canaan. Jacob recites the threefold blessing of God’s covenant that was made with him, his father, his grandfather with Joseph’s two sons.

- Promise of a personal blessing
- Promise to make a great nation
- Promise them a land in which to call home

Jacob wants these two grandsons to realize, “**What God had done for him was in spite of his faithlessness and failure.**” **It took Jacob his whole life to realize that what matters most in life is not what we have done for God but what He has done by His grace for us!** In verses 5-6 Jacob informs Joseph of his intent to adopt his two grandsons and make them his sons. In so doing he elevates them to the status of the first and second born replacing Ruben and Simeon who had disqualified themselves from the birthright. We are told why in 1 Chron 5:1-2 “*the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel; he was indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy is not listed according to the birthright; yet Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him came a ruler, although the birthright was Joseph's*”. **So in giving these two sons of Joseph an individual inheritance Jacob was giving Joseph a double portion, verse 22.** The second great event involved a person, Rachel.

- b. Vs. 7 This great event in Jacob’s life was the death of his beloved Rachel. The mention of this is to reinforce the reason of adopting Joseph’s two sons thinking that had she lived she might have had more children.

Jacob had learned to view the sorrows and disappointments of his life radically different. **Before life was just a long series of unfortunate disappointments with no real purpose.** He sought peace and prosperity at all costs and he came to realize that the cost was greater than the reward. Now he sees it from God’s perspective; God was not just interested in the temporal blessings and fleeting pleasures of life, **God was interested in making Jacob holy!** **We are far too concerned with our happiness and not near enough concerned about our holiness.** Jacob no longer wanted to sacrifice holiness at the altar of happiness and because of this he found peace and joy!

At the end of Jacob’s life, he embraces his grandchildren through a son whom he believed was dead. In Genesis 48:11 we see why this was such a treasured moment as Jacob remembers his failure to trust God and how the Lord worked in spite of his failure to do more than bring Joseph back into his life, God has allowed him to know his grandchildren. Then in verses 12-16 Jacob is guided by the Lord to put the right hand of

favor, upon the younger Ephraim instead of the older Manasseh. As you trace these two tribes through out their history you will find that this was a prophetically true. Ephraim became the leader above his older brother and later on Manasseh marched under Ephraim's banner through out the wilderness wondering. It is interesting to note that their names meant: "Manasseh" means "causing to forget" and "Ephraim" means "double fruit". At the end of the wilderness journey God would raise up another leader that would bring the nation into the land of promise Joshua who was from the tribe of Ephraim. In Isa. 7:8 the prophet refers to Ephraim as he describes the whole northern nation of Israel. In Jer. 31:9 the prophet records the heart of God saying, "*I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn.*" The blessing of verses 15-16 reveals the testimony of grace not merit. Jacob realizes that:

- a. God, is the God of his fathers who has always kept His promises.
- b. God was the ONE who has fed him all his life, and shepherded him. Adversity was not the enemy but a part of God's plan to shape him.
- c. In verse 16 Jacob looks back to the time when he wrestled with the Lord and says that God has purchased him out of an evil life. The evil that Jacob now saw was not the painful experiences of life but rather living a life that falls short of God's purposes and plans. Finally, Jacob blesses the two sons and desires in them that his name and the name of their forefathers will live on.

In the final analysis we find that God chose a failure like Jacob to be a patriarch and

Joseph who was far more righteous than his father does not even have a tribe named after him. Joseph is not the forerunner to the Messiah instead it is Judah who slept with one of his son's wife. Joseph won't be a part of the priestly line, that honor will belong to Levi who slaughtered the men of Shechem. God chooses as He wills and clearly it is the foolish things of the world.