



Jacob's Ladder Bible Story Summary

Jacob, the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham, was fleeing from his twin brother Esau, who had vowed to kill him. Esau was furious with Jacob because Jacob had stolen Esau's birthright, the Jewish claim to inheritance and blessing.

On his way to his relative's house at Haran, Jacob lay down for the night near Luz. As he was dreaming, he had a vision of a ladder, or stairway, between heaven and earth. God's angels were on it, ascending and descending.

Jacob saw God standing above the ladder. God repeated the promise of support he had made to Abraham and Isaac. He told Jacob his offspring would be many, blessing all the families of the earth. God then said,

"Behold, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."
(Genesis 28:15, NIV)

When Jacob awoke, he believed that God was present in that place. He took the stone he had been using to rest his head, poured oil on it and consecrated it to God. Then Jacob made a vow, saying,

"If God will be with me and will watch over me on journey I am taking, and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear, so that I return safely to my father's household, then the LORD will be my God, and this stone, that I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth to." (Genesis 28:20-22, NIV)

Jacob called the place Bethel, meaning "house of God."

Major Characters

Jacob: Son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham, Jacob was in the special family God had singled out to produce his chosen people. Jacob lived from approximately 2006 to 1859 B.C. However, his faith in the Lord was still immature at the time of this episode, evidenced by his character as a schemer, liar, and manipulator.

Jacob repeatedly trusted in his own devices rather than in God. Jacob cheated his brother Esau out of his birthright in exchange for a bowl of stew, then later deceived their father Isaac into blessing him instead of Esau, through an elaborate ruse.

Even after this prophetic dream and God's personal promise of protection, Jacob's resulting vow was still conditional: "*If God will be with me...then the Lord shall be my God...*" (Genesis 28:20-22, NIV). Years later, after Jacob physically wrestled with the Lord all night, he finally understood God could be trusted and put his full faith in him.

God the Father: The Creator, God of the universe, put his intricate plan of salvation in place starting with Abraham. One of Jacob's sons, Judah, would lead the tribe from which the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would come. So great is his power that God manipulated individuals, kingdoms, and empires to make this plan come about.

Through the centuries, God revealed himself to key people in this plan, such as Jacob. He guided and protected them, and in the case of Jacob, used them in spite of their personal flaws. God's motivation for saving humanity was his boundless love, expressed through the sacrifice of his only Son.

Angels: Angelic beings appeared on the ladder in Jacob's dream, ascending and descending between heaven and earth. Divine creatures created by God, angels serve as messengers and agents of God's will. Their activity symbolized getting their orders from God in heaven, going to earth to carry them out, then returning to heaven to report and receive further orders. They do not act on their own.

Throughout the Bible, angels transmit instructions to humans and help them carry out their missions. Even Jesus was ministered to by angels, following his temptation in the wilderness and his agony at Gethsemane. Jacob's dream was a rare glimpse behind the scenes into the invisible world and a promise of God's support.

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