

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“Nowhere to Look But Up”

Genesis 28:1-22

2003

Introduction

Hitting bottom seems to be a prerequisite for usefulness in God’s kingdom.

Moses hit bottom during his forty years in the desert after attempting to deliver the Israelites by his own power.

Joseph hit bottom after his dream of being ruler over his brothers was dashed by repeated false accusations against him.

Peter hit bottom shortly after boasting that he would never deny the Lord.

The apostle Paul described hitting bottom in 2 Cor 1:8-9:

“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.”

Hitting bottom is enormously valuable, because when you’re on the bottom, there is “Nowhere to look but up!” In fact, hitting bottom is so essential to the life of faith, that God not only allows us to come to the end of ourselves, but often helps to facilitate that process – most often through failure.

I don’t believe a person can be truly useful to God until he or she has been ruined by God.

I Jacob’s Departure

A. Isaac **blessed** Jacob [Verse 1a]

At this point Isaac is about 130 years old and Jacob and Esau are about 70.

In Genesis 27, Jacob deceptively acquired the blessing of his father, Isaac.

But now in Gen 28, we find that Isaac has finally resigned himself to the fact that, despite his stubborn resistance, God was going to bless Jacob rather than Esau.

B. Isaac instructed Jacob [Verse 1b-2]

1. Do not marry a Canaanite woman

Gen 26:34-35 “When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah.”

Gen 27:46 “Then Rebekah said to Isaac, “I’m disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living.”

2. Take a **wife** from among the daughters of Laban

I Cor 6:14-16 “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and

Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

- C. Isaac pronounced a blessing on Jacob [Verse 3-4]
1. May God Almighty bless you and made you fruitful
Isaac gives Jacob the same blessing God gave Adam in Genesis 1:28, and the same blessing and commission God gave Abraham in Gen 12:3.
 - a. To be fruitful = Parah = “To bear fruit”
 - b. To increase = Rabah = “To multiply”
 - c. To become a community of peoples

Application:

God’s ultimate goal is not to simply fill the earth with people but to fill the new heaven and the new earth with worshippers!!

What’s His strategy?

1. He wants you to bear fruit
John 15:8 “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”
 2. He wants you to multiply yourself
2 Timothy 2:2 “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”
2. May He give you the blessing and land of Abraham
Jacob is promised a land, a nation, and a blessing, even as Abraham was (Gen 12:1-3).

- D. Isaac sent Jacob on his way [Verse 5]
Tragically, this is the last time Jacob will see his mother.

II Esau’s Reaction To His Father

- A. He learned of Isaac’s instruction to Jacob [Verse 6-7]
Ex 20:12 “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.”
- B. He realized that his wives displeased Isaac [Verse 8]
Apparently, it never concerned Esau to know that his Canaanite wives were a source of grief to his mother. But he became very concerned when he discovered that they also displeased his father.
The text seems to indicate that Esau had not been taught that marriage to a Canaanite woman would be inconsistent with the will of God and unsatisfactory to his parents.

Application:

Here we see the terrible consequences of Isaac and Rebekah’s failure as parents:

1. They failed to offer themselves as reliable models of true godliness.
2. They failed to properly instruct their children in the ways of the Lord.
3. They failed to raise their sons impartially.

- C. He married, Mahalath, daughter of Ishmael [Verse 9]
 Esau married two Canaanite women in disobedience to God's commands.
 Then he added to his troubles by marrying another wife from the line of Ishmael.

Illustration: Sometimes in our effort to dig ourselves out of a hole, we can make a bad situation worse!
 A married man who lived an immoral lifestyle and eventually committed adultery. He eventually wanted to come back to the Lord, but believed that in order for him to ever be happy, he had to divorce his Christian wife. So he did. Now he wants to move on with his life and be received again into fellowship. But he refuses to fully repent, be reconciled to his wife, and live in obedience to God's commands.

Isa 30:1 "Woe to the obstinate children," declares the LORD, "to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin."

III Jacob's Dream

- A. Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran [Verse 10-11]
 It was about a 400-mile journey to Paddan-Aram.

I believe that Jacob was finally at the end of himself.

1. Physically: He was in a barren, rocky wasteland in the middle of nowhere
2. Socially: He was separated from his family and fleeing for his life.
3. Materially: He had nothing but the shirt on his back.
4. Spiritually: He was distant from God, alone and without hope.

All the years of scheming – all the years of deception – all the years of Self-reliance had produced a broken life. It was the ideal moment for God to break into his life.

1. He stopped for the night along the way
 Bethel was about 70 miles from his destination of Paddan-Aram.
2. He put a stone under his head for a pillow
 In many cultures, sleeping on the ground without a pillow is common.

- B. Jacob had a dream [Verse 12]
 Heb 1:1-2 "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe."

When did Jacob receive this revelation? When he was striving and scheming?

When he was “working the angles”? No, but when he was sleeping!!

Isa 30:15 “In repentance and rest is your salvation...”

1. He saw a **stairway** reaching to heaven

Stairway = Cullam (sool-lawm`) = “A stair-case”

What is the significance of the stairway?

Is it teaching us that salvation is achieved by climbing Jacob’s ladder?

Is it teaching us that we must do certain works in order to reach God?

The real significance of the stairway is revealed to us by Jesus in John 1:51:

“I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Jesus Himself is the stairway to heaven; He does not show us a way, He is the way!

John 14:6 “Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Tim 2:5 “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

Ultimately it was Jesus Christ who bridged the gap between heaven and earth. It is through Him that God has come down to man. It is through Him that man has access to God.

2. He saw angels ascending and descending

Heb 1:14 “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who inherit salvation?”

Angels are constantly serving the purposes of God who sends them of assignments to serve the church. And when they accomplish one mission they return for the next – and the next – and the next.

I believe, without question, there are angels right here in our midst.

Whether we see them or not, they are here serving those who will inherit eternal life!

- C. Jacob heard the Lord speak to him [Verse 13-15]

1. I am the Lord, the God of Abraham and Isaac

2. I will give you the **land** you are lying on

3. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth

Gen 13:16 “I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.”

4. All **peoples** on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring

Offspring = Zera’ = “Seed” or “Posterity”

Gal 3:16-17 “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed.

The Scripture does not say “and to seeds” meaning many people,

but “And to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ.”

Application:

When you become a child of God, you received not only the Privilege of sonship, but also the responsibility of sharing the Covenant blessings with others.

2 Cor 5:17-20 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has Committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal Through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled To God.”

5. I will be with you and **watch** over you

Isa 41:10 “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

6. I will bring you back to this land

Over the next 20 years, Jacob would never forget this dream. He realized that, despite the fears of his brother’s murderous threats, he would one day have to return to the land of promise.

7. I will not **leave** you until I have done what I promised

Application: What God starts-God finishes!

Phillipians 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.”

IV Jacob’s Reaction To His Heavenly Father

A. Jacob awoke from his sleep he said: **[Verse 16-17]**

1. The Lord is in this **place**, and I was not aware of it

I find this phrase very interesting: God was with Jacob but Jacob didn’t perceive it!

Ps 139:7-10 “ Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your Presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there: if I make my bed in The depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on The far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”

Application: Maybe you are in a rocky, seemingly God-forsaken place in your life right now. Maybe you think God has abandoned you--that you have been so bad and so sinful that God has forsaken you. You may be

tempted to think these things, but you would be wrong!

I'm here to remind you that God loves you! He will never leave you or forsake you (Heb 13:5). He has "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jer 29:11)

And just because you don't see or understand His methods or timing doesn't mean He isn't working out his wonderful purposes.

2. How awesome is this place

A. This is the **house** of God

B. This is the **gate** of heaven

John 10:9 "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."

Matt 7:13-14 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

B. Jacob took his stone pillow and set up a memorial [verse 18-19]

1. He set it up as a **pillar**

In response to God's blessing, Jacob sets up his stone pillow as a reminder of His encounter with God.

2. He poured oil on top of it

3. He called the place Bethel

Bethel = "House of God"

Luz = "Separation"

Application: We were all once living in a state of separation from God.

But, like Jacob, we have been divinely directed and guided to the house of God.

Col 1:21-22 "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."

C. Jacob made a conditional vow to God [verse 20-22]

1. His **conditions:**

a. If God will be with me

b. If God will **watch** over me on this journey

c. If God will give me food to eat and clothes to wear

Matt 6:33-34 "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

d. If God brings me back safely to my father's house

2. His **promises:**

a. Then the Lord will be my God

What I find so interesting is that while Jacob is negotiating his decision to become a follower of God, God had already long before chosen Jacob to be his son in the faith

John 15:16 “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-fruit that will last.

Eph 1:4-7 “ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will- to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves.

b. Then the stone will be God’s house

Gen 35:1 “ Then God said to Jacob, “Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an alter there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau”

c. Then I will give God a **tenth** of ALL He gives

Tenth = Ma’aser = “A tithe”

Note: It was a tenth of ALL he received from God (gross income)

The tithe is not a debt paid to God . And it’s not a ticket price for coming to church. Rather, it is a tangible acknowledgement that everything we have belongs to God. ***When we tithe, we are letting go of our selfishness. When we tithe, we’re declaring God’s sovereignty over our lives and finances.***

Mal 3:8-11 “Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. “But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ “In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse-the whole nation of you- because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, “ says the LORD almighty, “And see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”

Bumper Sticker “Tithe if you love Jesus – any idiot can honk”

Was Jacob a believer?

I don’t see any evidence of saving faith in Jacob prior to Genesis 28. But here in chapter 28 Jacob has an experience similar to the Apostle Paul who had an encounter with God on his way to Damascus (Acts 9:1ff). Both men were stopped short by a vision, which was to change the course of their lives.

I find three evidences that Jacob was converted and became a follower of God:

1. We see it in his declaration of spiritual surrender and allegiance
“The Lord will be my God.”

Rom 10:9-10 “That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord,”
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be

saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”

2. We see it in his worship

He builds an altar for God – a place of sacrifice and worship

Matt 4:10 “Jesus said, ... ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

3. We see it in his works

He gives a tithe of all God gives him

Prov 3:9-10 “Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim over with new wine.”

If God has a person’s allegiance, worship and money – He has a true disciple!

Conclusion

I’d like to give you a chance to respond to what God has done here today:

1. Maybe you’re here today, and you never realized that you have access to heaven through God’s Son, Jesus Christ. If you would like to make him the Lord of your life today, you can by simply giving your heart and allegiance to him:
 - a. Ask him to forgive your sins
 - b. Invite him to come into your heart and be the Lord of your life
 - c. Surrender your life completely to him as a daily act of worship
2. Maybe you’re here today and you feel like you’ve hit rock bottom. You have “nowhere to look but up!” I want to encourage you! It may not be the end, but a beautiful beginning of greater usefulness to God than ever before!

Remember: “No one has ever been truly useful to God until they were ruined by God.” It happened to Moses, Joseph, Peter and even Paul. It will happen to you too! The struggles you are facing today, may very well be divinely permitted in order to bring you to the end of yourself – as Paul said, “That you might not rely on yourself but on God, who raises the dead.”

You may not perceive it, but God is here. He is present in whatever difficulties and hardship you may be facing today. And he will never leave you or forsake you.

You have His Word on it!

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