

# JACOB'S LADDER

Adapted from a Sermon by the Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith

*Then Jacob 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 (Genesis 28:12).*

Jacob was in trouble. He had taken his brother Esau's place—buying his birthright for a mess of pottage and receiving their father's blessing through trickery. Esau had sworn vengeance. Jacob had to escape. So he left his family and started out on a long journey of nearly 400 miles. He was going to Haran, the land where his relative Laban lived.

One night, as he lay down to rest in the open with a stone for his pillow, he had a dream. For the first time the Lord appeared to him, standing at the top of a ladder, or stairway. Going up and coming down that ladder were angels. The Lord spoke to Jacob, telling him who He was and promising that Jacob's descendants would be plentiful and dwell in the land of Canaan. When he woke from the dream, Jacob recognized the significance of God appearing to him. He set up a pillar to commemorate the event and made a vow that the Lord would be his God.

This was a major turning point in Jacob's life, not only because he was leaving home for the first time, but because of his dream. He had a vision of angels ascending and descending upon the ladder, with the Lord at the top. Like Jacob, we too sometimes have experiences that lift our spirits above ordinary things to see the Lord's presence in our lives.

Jacob's journey away from his homeland is symbolic of a journey we all make, away from the ideas and ideals in which we were raised. We must then travel to Haran, a distant land made up of the numbing details of every day life. These details are not bad. In fact, they are necessary for survival. We need to go to school or to work. We need to care for our homes and the world around us. We need to spend time with friends and family. And we need to relax. But while we are caught up in all these details, we can be far removed from any conscious awareness of the Lord's presence.

Things may be going relatively well. But something is missing. Our lives are natural but not really spiritual—spiritually we are asleep. Our hours are filled, but for what purpose? Where is the connection between what is heavenly and what is earthly? What is the point of it all?

Then a dream comes to us. In quiet moments of reflection, when we are not caught up in planning the next day's schedule, the Lord leads us to see something special. Jacob saw the ladder with angels ascending and descending. In a similar way, He directs our minds to see that there is a connection between the ordinary things, which we must deal with every day, and heaven.

Sometimes this happens through nature. We know that the Lord created everything, but how often do we see His presence there? Yet, occasionally, when we look around, our thoughts are lifted up. In the smallest buds or even blades of grass we can see something of creation and

Divine order. We see the connection between this world and the Lord. Another occasion might be the sight of little children at play. We are suddenly struck by their innocence, and sense the presence of heaven in their honest observations.

These moments may not happen often, but when they do, we have a vision of angels ascending upon the ladder that leads directly to the Lord. From the top of the ladder, the Lord seems to speak directly to us—promising that He will be our God and give us everything we could possibly need.

And then, from the top of the ladder, we can begin a descent. From the vision and conviction that the Lord is present in our lives, and that His way is worth following, we begin to take delight in doing good things. The ideas and ideals from heaven begin to enter our ordinary lives. For example, a belief in the importance of charity may lead us to overcome our shyness and offer help to a stranger or greet someone new. These actions are the angels descending the ladder, coming down from the spiritual world into the natural, to complete the circuit.

When Jacob awoke from his dream, he was deeply moved. His first response was to recognize the Lord's presence: "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it" (Genesis 28:16). His surprise is ours also. When we see angels ascending and descending, we also are impressed with the Lord's presence in our lives. Do these occasional visions of the connections with heavenly life change our lives? Are we suddenly different? Probably not. But they allow us to see a renewed meaning in the simple things. Seeing these connections with the Lord gives us a new sense of purpose and use. Jacob arose and set up a pillar of remembrance and made a vow to follow the Lord. And our actions can be like his. When we see how everything leads upwards to the Lord, and then from Him comes down to affect every aspect of life, we should be moved to action.

The Lord gives us these dreams whenever we begin our many journeys in life. As we become immersed in countless routines, the Lord gives us a vision of what can be. He allows us to see the interconnectedness of all natural and spiritual things. He gives us the vision of a ladder with angels going up and coming down that we might be inspired in His ways and have the strength to walk in them. So when these visions come to us, let us rise up, sensing the Lord's presence, and establish a pillar in our lives—an eternal remembrance that we are part of the Lord's kingdom.