

“I Will...If”

In obedience to the urging of his father, Isaac, not to take “*a wife of the daughters of Canaan*,” Jacob left Canaan and journeyed to Padanaram to obtain a wife “*of the daughters of Laban*,” his uncle (Gen. 28:1,2,5). Enroute to his destination, Jacob tarried at a place at sunset and lay down to sleep with a stone for his pillow. It was here that he dreamed and beheld “*a ladder set up on the earth*,” the top of which reached heaven, on which the angels of God ascended and descended. At this point God addressed Jacob and repeated to him the promises that had been made to his grandfather, Abraham (Gen. 28:11-15). Upon awakening Jacob realized that the Lord was “*in this place*” (v. 16); whereupon he took the stone he had used for a pillow and “*set it up for a pillar*” and “*called the name of that place Bethel*” (v. 18,19). Note the following: “*And Jacob vowed a vow saying, if God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my Father’s house in peace; Then shall the Lord be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a ladder, shall be God’s house: and of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee*” (Gen. 28:20-22).

Regarding the phrase, “*If God will be with me*,” Adam Clarke says: “Jacob seems to make this vow rather for his posterity than for himself, as we may learn from verses 13-15; for he particularly refers to the promises which God had made to him, which considered the multiplication of his offspring, and their establishment in that land” (Clark’s Commentary, Vol. 1., Page 178).

Mr. Clarke may be right in his comment. I have included it so as to be charitable, granting that it might be a possibility. However, if one simply reads what is said, it appears that Jacob was seeking to “drive a hard bargain.” It is true that he promised to give a tenth unto God (and many would call that real generous) but note the conditions: (1) **If** God would be with him, (2) **If** God would keep him in the way he went, (3) **If** God would give him bread to eat, (4) **If** God would give him raiment to wear, and (5) **If** God made it possible for him to return again to his father’s house in peace, **then** the Lord would be his God and Jacob would give to Him a tenth!

It seems that Jacob still has a lot of counterparts in the land, some of whom are also in the church. Observe: “**If** company doesn’t come,” “**if** the weather is pretty,” “**If** I feel good,” “**If** something else doesn’t interfere,” “**If** I am in the mood,” “**if** I wake up in time,” etc., etc., **then** I’ll be there Sunday morning in time for preaching.” Also, “**if** I have anything left over after I pay all my bills,” and “**if** it looks as though I won’t be hard pressed until the next paycheck, I’ll try to give something to the church.” “Yes, I would probably do more visiting, **if** it weren’t for my work, **If** I didn’t have so many things on my mind, and **if** I really thought it would do some good.”

It is absolutely amazing how faithful and true some people would be **if** service to God never involved any inconveniences, any effort, or any sacrifice. This reminds me of the man who said to his girl friend: “Honey, I love you so much that I’d go through fire and **water** to be with you,” and then concluded, saying, “I’ll come see you tonight **if** it isn’t **raining**.” A man who no greater devotion than that is not ready for marriage, nor are people whose devotion is too limited to enable them to “*endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*” (2 Tim 2:3), ready for heaven. What we need in today’s world is fewer Jacobites and more real **Christians**!

*** — B. Witherington