

Monday Week 11 **The Children of Israel**

Q41 What did God tell Jacob when he dreamed of a ladder to heaven?

- A. God gave Jacob the blessing of Abraham and Isaac when he dreamed of the ladder going to heaven.

Bible Reading: Gen. 28:10-17

A small boy dreamed that he looked up into the sky and a very large foot appeared coming out of a cloud. The foot looked like it was a human foot and it had the color of skin. But it was so large that the boy thought it might be God's foot! The dream seemed so real that he wondered if it was true. But he never dreamed it again, and he never saw a large foot coming out of a cloud when he was awake. Did the dream have a meaning? Probably not. The boy had heard about Jesus coming in the clouds, and maybe that's what made him dream what he did. But the dream wasn't necessarily a sign from God, because that was over fifty years ago.

Most of your dreams do not have meanings. But Jacob's dream was different. Before there was a Bible, God sometimes spoke to people in dreams. God was showing Jacob about heaven. God was calling Jacob to believe in Him. He is calling us to believe in Him, too. Sometimes He still uses dreams. More often, though, God speaks to us through the Bible.

Thinking Deeper

Jacob's encounter with God began as a dream. When he awoke, he realized that God had been there. "Surely the Lord is in this place." Most of us will never have a dream like Jacob did. That doesn't mean we won't encounter God. Each of us, as an individual, must have an encounter with God. Each of our children must also have an individual encounter with God. It is one thing to hear what God has done in the past, and to see how God has influenced the lives of family and spiritual mentors, but it is another thing to have a personal encounter with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Although Jacob had heard of God's covenant with Abraham and Isaac, he needed his own experience with God. Jacob's encounter was unexpected. "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." God confronts people in His own time. Jacob was discerning enough to realize that God had met him. He responded to God's initiative. Jacob certainly wasn't perfect when God called him, and the process he went through to make him the man God wanted him to be was a long one. At Bethel, Jacob began going moving toward God. And it was because He was going toward God that God blessed him. As one has said, God is not as concerned about where we are as the direction we are headed. If we head God's direction, God will bless us.

Tuesday Week 11 **The Children of Israel**

Q42 What new name did God give Jacob at Peniel?

God changed Jacob's name to Israel.

Bible Reading: Gen. 32:24-32

Did you ever hear of Jonny Appleseed? He was famous for planting apple trees when America had frontier country. His real name was John Chapman. Did you know that famous gangster Billy the Kid's name was really Henry McCarty? And Geronimo the famous American Indian was really Goyathlay? Tiger Woods is really Eldrick? And Bill Clinton's name was William Blythe before it was changed? Some people change their names. Why? Maybe they are ashamed of something in their past. Maybe they just don't like the sound of their name. Maybe they become famous and a new name sticks to them. Whatever the reason, sometimes people do change their names. The reason Jacob's name was changed was because God changed it. God blessed Jacob with a new heart and a new name.

Thinking Deeper

Jacob had his name changed to Israel. His name was changed because God changed it. Jacob meant "heel holder" or "supplanter." That's what he was before he knew God. He grasped his brother's heel when he was born. He grasped his brother's birthright and he grasped his brother's blessing. But God changed his heart when he wrestled at Peniel. And God told him his name would not be Jacob anymore, but Israel, which meant "God prevails." When God prevails in a person's life, his life is changed for the better. That doesn't mean that his circumstances are always better or his bankbook is always better, but the person becomes better. Jacob had the mark of God in his life. In a physical sense, he may not have been better off because he walked with a limp from then on. But he became a better man.

Jay was a professional man who made a lot of money and had a way about him that turned things in his favor. He also had vices. He was a sinner. However, God arranged circumstances that God his attention to his deep need. Jay came to the place where he knew that God was dealing with him. His encounter with God changed him. His wild days were over. He had a new heart. God does that with people who listen to Him. He makes them better.

"Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Wednesday Week 11 **The Children of Israel**

Q43 How many sons did Jacob have whose families became known as “the children of Israel?”

A Jacob had twelve sons whose families became known as the children of Israel.

Bible Reading: Gen. 35:22c-26

A father in Kansas was told that perhaps he had too many children. When he looked around the table at mealtime at each one of his children, he couldn't think which one he wanted to get rid of. He loved them all

A man named Dr. Annesley had twenty four children. His twenty fourth child was a little girl. She was named Susanna. When she grew up, Susanna married a man named Samuel Wesley. After she was married, she had nineteen children. Her fifteenth child became a great man. His name was John Wesley. He was the minister who began the Methodist Church. That was over 200 years ago. Some people still have families with lots of children. In Bible times many people had lots of children. Jacob had twelve sons and at least one daughter. Remember his name was changed to Israel? After his sons grew up and had children, all their families together were known as the Children of Israel. God has used these large families to bless the world.

Thinking Deeper

Families can be a blessing. They can also bring heartache. A study was done of the descendents of Jonathan Edwards, the great New England preacher, who had married a godly woman. Some very influential people came from that family. One hundred of them were in some kind of ministry related profession including preachers, missionaries and teachers. Sixty became doctors, fourteen were college presidents, and sixty five became college professors. Three became United States Senators, thirty became judges, one hundred became lawyers and seventy five were officers in the Army or Navy.

Another study was done of a family by the name Jukes. Among their descendents one hundred twenty eight became prostitutes (who gave venereal disease to four hundred forty others), sixty became thieves, one hundred forty became criminals, at least two were murderers, and sixty four spent time in what was known as the poorhouse.

A family can have a wonderful influence, but it is important that the foundation is on the Bible. Jesus said when we build our house on the rock of his sayings, our house will stand firm. The great thing about the power of God is that someone with faith can start a new family line which is godly. No matter what your past, you can “raise up the foundations of many generations.”

Thursday Week 11 **The Children of Israel**

Q44 Where did the children of Israel go when there was a great famine?

A The children of Israel went to Egypt when there was a great famine.

Bible Reading: Acts 7:9-15

Two boys got on a train for a long trip. All they had with them was a couple sandwiches. They hadn't thought to take much money with them. The trip lasted over two days. They started in Pennsylvania, then through Ohio and Indiana. When they got to Chicago, IL, they were really hungry. But they still had many, many miles to go. One of them had a few coins and at a station bought some crackers. That helped them, but they were still hungry. A night and a day went by and they were going through the Rocky Mountains. The scenery was beautiful, but they were getting more and more hungry. Another night came and they got some sleep. When they woke up, they were still hungry. The day dragged on as they went through Eastern Washington and on west. By the time they got to the train depot in Seattle, they were famished. A family friend met them with a car. He knew they were hungry because their mother had called. Their first stop was a steak house. How those boys ate! Their famine was over.

Israel's sons went to Egypt to find food because of a great famine. God provided food for them, but they had to go a long way from home to get it. They would stay in Egypt for 400 years.

Thinking Deeper

Some famines have been used for political advantage. In 1932 and 1933 the Russian communist government orchestrated a famine in Ukraine that killed millions of people. Here's basically how it happened. The government noted people who were somewhat successful, or capitalistic. They called them kulaks. These were undesirable people since they didn't fit in with the plans for equalization. Their possessions, including houses, lands and grain, were taken by the government. The kulaks were often taken prisoner, ushered away and never seen again. Those who were left were put on collective farms.

If some poor people were left on their own land, they were required to produce a certain quota of grain to be given to the government. The collective farms were also given quotas. These quotas in Ukraine were set so high that all the grain was taken by the communists, shipped elsewhere, and not even seed grain was left for the people. Horses, cows, babies, children; all were starving. Horses were allotted only straw to eat, yet put to work as normal. Soon they were dead. People all over Ukraine were starved because the government stole their grain and did nothing to help them. Some Ukrainians were able to escape to other places and survive. Ten million of them did not.

This is one of many dark chapter in the history of communism. Whereas true Christians have historically gone to places stricken by famine with relief, communists actually produced a famine to further their political goals.

Friday Week 11 **The Children of Israel**

Review the Week's Questions

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Far up north there are large furry animals called musk oxen. One of their enemies is the wolf pack, which will attack a young musk ox. The way the older animals protect their young is to make a circle with young in the center. The big oxen stand with their heads outward, so that the wolves cannot get to their young without facing the heavy horns of the adults. As long as they maintain their circle, the wolves cannot get to the young. But if an ox gets nervous and leaves the circle, the wolves get an opportunity to attack a single animal. It is important for the oxen to stand as a group against their enemies.

Your family can be a place of safety, as long as you stay under God's protection. Don't get nervous and run away from God. Stay in the circle of God's safety.

Thinking Deeper

God made families in the beginning of the story of man. When He has wanted to do something significant, He has often used a family. Examples are Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, patriarchs of the chosen people of God. Great men and women of more recent history have often had great family influence. John and Charles Wesley came from a great family. Jonathan Edwards and his wife formed a great family with a great legacy. George Washington and Abraham Lincoln both had godly influences in their childhood. The godly influence of John Adams extended to two of his descendents who became Presidents. Their son John Adams and his son John Quincy Adams were the second and sixth Presidents of the United States. Both have left witness of the importance of their faith. Godly people often have an influence that lasts far after they are gone. Missionary families often produce missionaries. Preacher families often produce preachers.

It is little wonder that the popular culture often denigrates families and godliness. What God pronounces good, the world and the devil will mock. The institution of marriage is attacked and the definition of marriage has been distorted. Even the word family is divested of its meaning. What God has meant for good and for stability, the world has turned to evil and trouble.

It is of great import that Christians maintain the Biblical stand for families and keep a safe spiritual environment for children. The future will be blessed in the measure that godly families influence coming generations.

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