

## THE EVIDENCE OF GOD'S WORK OF SAVING GRACE

*25<sup>19</sup>Now this is the account of Abraham's son, Isaac. Abraham was the father of Isaac. 20Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, she was the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian from Paddan-aram and the sister of Laban the Syrian. 21Isaac prayed to Jehovah on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. Jehovah answered his prayer and Rebekah his wife became pregnant. 22Now the babies struggled against each other within her womb. So she said, If this be the case, why should I continue to live? And she went to ask Jehovah. 23And Jehovah said to her, Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples coming from your bosom shall be separated. One people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger. 24When the time came for her to give birth, it was discovered that there had been twins in her womb. 25The first son who came out of the womb was red, his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau.\* 26Afterwards his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel. So they named him Jacob.\*\* Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to the twins. (Gen. 25:19-26)*

Esau means "Red;" Jacob means "One who takes by the heel"

### **Introduction**

We are all familiar with trademarks and logos. They play a very prominent role in a company's identification and advertising. Companies and craftsmen like to be identified by their signature trademark; it is their distinctive mark that sets them apart from their competitors. Top ranking companies are concerned not only to protect their distinctive trademark, but are also concerned that their trademark is attached to a product of superior quality and craftsmanship. As one slogan puts it: "Before the name goes on, the quality goes in." Companies are identified with their trademark or logo: at the end of every T.V. commercial the logo is flashed on the screen; in magazine advertisements the company logo is prominent; and on the product itself the logo is proudly displayed.

What is the trademark of God's work of saving grace? What are the distinguishing marks of divine grace at work in a man's life? God's work of saving grace will be evident in a man's life, making him distinct and different from the natural man: *"if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things have passed away; they have become new"* (2 Cor. 5:17.) To discover the trademark of God's grace—the evidence of God's work of saving grace—let us look at the life of Jacob.

We read in Genesis 25:23 that the LORD revealed to Rebekah that the two babies in her womb would become the progenitors of two separate nations of people. But most significantly, the LORD revealed that the older son would serve the younger; in other words, contrary to the prevailing custom, the younger son would receive the pre-eminent position. In the case of the Old Testament patriarchs, (the earthly fathers of God's covenant people,) receiving the pre-eminent position also meant

receiving the covenantal blessing—in the case of Jacob and Esau it meant being the son who was the recipient of God’s saving grace and who would carry on the covenant line. The New Testament (Romans 9:6-12) indicates that the LORD bestowed His sovereign saving grace upon Jacob while He passed over Esau, allowing him to follow the natural course of his own sinful heart. Thus, in order to discover the trademark of God’s grace—the evidence of God’s work of saving grace—let us look at the life of Jacob.

## **I. If God’s Saving Grace is at Work in Your Life, You will have an Active Desire for the Divine Blessing**

*The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. <sup>28</sup>Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. <sup>29</sup>Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. <sup>30</sup>He said to Jacob, “Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I am famished!” (That is why he was also called Edom.) <sup>31</sup>Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright.” <sup>32</sup>“Look, I am about to die,” Esau said. “What good is the birthright to me?” <sup>33</sup>But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. <sup>34</sup>Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright. (Gen. 25:27-34)*

Genesis 25:27-34 records the account in which Jacob procures his brother’s birthright. The birthright included the right to become the head of the family, to assume the position formerly occupied by the father—it traditionally was bestowed on the eldest son. In the case of the patriarchs, as noted in the introduction, the birthright also included the covenant blessings of the LORD—note Abimelech’s words to Isaac recorded in Genesis 26:29b; *“You now are the blessed of Jehovah.”*

The transfer of the birthright from the elder son to the younger reveals their spiritual priorities. Esau is so focused on the immediate gratification of his earthly desires that he discounts the birthright—with all of its spiritual and divine significance. In his comments made to Jacob, Esau reveals his lack of zeal, or even interest, in the divine covenant: *“Esau said to Jacob, I beg you, feed me with that same red pottage, for I am famished. <sup>31</sup>And Jacob said, First sell me your birthright. <sup>32</sup>And Esau said, Look, I am about to die. What good is the birthright to me?”* (Gen.25:30-32.) Esau’s opinion is that it is not worth dying for the divine blessing. Esau’s action and attitude reflect the mind of the natural man, as defined by the Apostle Paul when writing to the Philippians, *“As I have often told you, and even now tell you with tears, many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup>Their destiny is perdition, their god is their own appetites, and they glory in their shameful conduct. They set their minds on earthly things”* (Phil. 3:18-19.)

Although Jacob wrongly takes advantage of Esau’s weakness and moment of vulnerability, he shows an active interest in the covenant blessing. Although his

actions are unworthy, his attitude shows the work of God's grace: there is an **active** desire to possess the covenant blessing, note how that desire is graphically presented in Matthew 11:12, *"from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and men of violence take it by force."* Those whom our Lord describes in Matthew 11:12 have the commendable attitude that says, "We **must** have entrance into the kingdom of God! We shall do whatever it takes to gain entrance!" They exhibit an active interest in the divine blessing—this is the very attitude Jacob expresses in the case of his seeking to procure the birthright.

Contrast this with the attitude expressed by another Old Testament character, the false prophet, Balaam; Balaam pleads, *"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my final end be like his"* (Num. 23:10b.) Balaam **desired** the final state of the redeemed—but not enough to do what was needed to secure it. Balaam refused to surrender himself to the LORD—when the LORD refused to grant him permission to respond to the call of the king of Moab to curse the people of Israel (Num. 22:12,) Balaam sought to do so anyway. Consequently, *"God's anger was aroused because [Balaam] went; then the angel of Jehovah set himself in the roadway as an adversary against him"* (Num. 22:22.)

If God's saving grace is at work in your life, you will have an **active** desire for the divine blessing—a desire that does what is necessary to procure the blessings of the kingdom of God, namely, you will trust the Lord Jesus Christ with a trust that submits yourself unto Him.

## II. If God's Saving Grace is at Work in Your Life, You will have Respect for God's Sacred Covenant

*Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am 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." 28 So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him and commanded him: "Do not marry a Canaanite woman. 2Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. 3May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. 4May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham." 5Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way, and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, who was the mother of Jacob and Esau. (Gen.27:46-28:5)*

Like his father, Abraham, before him, Isaac also shows a concern that his son, Jacob, have a believing spouse—one who will share with him a true faith in the LORD. He instructs Jacob to not marry a daughter of the Canaanites; but rather to take a wife from his family in Paddan Aram who had a knowledge of the LORD and a connection to the covenant community (Gen. 28:1-2.)

Jacob obeys his father's directive and sets out for the distant country of Paddan Aram. In so doing he is showing a respect for the LORD's sacred covenant—he is aware that the people of God are to be distinct from the world and they are to maintain that distinctiveness as God's holy people, as the Apostle Paul exhorts the Corinthians, *"Come out from among them and be separate, says the LORD. Touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you. <sup>18</sup> I will be a Father to you and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty. <sup>7</sup> Therefore, since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God"* (2 Cor. 6:17-7:1.)

At this point also, Jacob's action is different from that of Esau. Esau initially took **two** wives from the daughters of the Canaanites: *"When Esau was forty years old he married Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite"* (Gen. 26:34.) Later, in an inept attempt to gain Isaac's blessing, Esau takes another wife from Ishmael's family:

*Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him away to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. <sup>7</sup>Esau observed that Jacob obeyed his father and his mother and went to Paddan-aram. <sup>8</sup>Esau realized that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac. <sup>9</sup>So Esau went to Ishmael and married Mahalath who was the sister of Nebaioth and the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son—besides the wives that he had. (Gen. 28:6-9)*

Esau does not comprehend the fact that Ishmael is not a part of the covenant community, (he is a son of Abraham, but he does not possess the faith of Abraham.) Esau fails to comprehend the spiritual significance of the covenant, viewing things only from a physical, earthly perspective—Esau's gesture is superficially religious, because he lacks any true vital spiritual life.

If God's saving grace is at work in your life, you will have respect for God's sacred covenant, taking to heart the command contained in Leviticus 20:7-8,26,

*Therefore, sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am Jehovah your God. <sup>8</sup>You shall keep my statutes and obey them; I am Jehovah who sanctifies you. ... you shall be holy for me; because I, Jehovah, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations in order that you should be mine. (Lev. 20:7-8,26)*

### **III. If God's Saving Grace is at Work in Your Life, You will have a Holy Fear of the LORD**

*Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. <sup>11</sup>When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. <sup>12</sup>He had a dream in which he saw a*

*stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. <sup>13</sup>There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. <sup>14</sup>Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. <sup>15</sup>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."*

*<sup>16</sup>When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." <sup>17</sup>He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."*

*<sup>18</sup>Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. <sup>19</sup>He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz. <sup>20</sup>Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear <sup>21</sup>so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God <sup>22</sup>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." (Gen. 28:10-22)*

Genesis 28:10-15 records the divine revelation Jacob received when he set out for Paddan Aram. He saw a ladder extending between heaven and earth, the angels of God were ascending and descending this staircase-like ladder, and the LORD Himself is seen standing above the ladder. Note that the whole emphasis of this revelation is the assurance of the LORD's covenant blessing. The vision itself—with the ladder and the angels—indicates the unbroken connection between the LORD and His people, as well as His divine ministry to them. When the LORD speaks to Jacob He identifies Himself as "*Jehovah*," the covenant God of his fathers, He confirms to Jacob the covenant promises, and He assures Jacob of His divine protection. The very timing of the vision was intended to convey divine assurance to Jacob: it comes to him as he sets out on his journey away from the Promised Land in obedience to his father's command.

It is very significant how Jacob responds to this divine revelation: "*Jacob awoke out of his sleep and said, Surely Jehovah is in this place, and I was unaware of it. <sup>17</sup>He was afraid and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven*" (Gen. 28:16-17.) Even as the LORD ministers His covenant mercy and blessing, Jacob is aware of the awesome majesty of the LORD God, and he expresses a holy, reverent fear of God.

Compare Jacob's attitude towards the LORD with that of the wicked as recorded in Job 21:14-15, "*They say to God, "Get away from us! We have no desire to know your ways. <sup>15</sup>Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? What will we gain by praying to him?"* Their whole attitude is that of using God, rather than worshipping Him and reverencing Him as God.

If God's saving grace is at work in your life, you will have a holy fear of the LORD, the attitude described by the Apostle Peter,

*... if you call upon the Father who judges impartially according to each one's work, live your remaining time on earth in fear, <sup>18</sup>knowing that you were redeemed from your futile way of life handed down from your forefathers—not by perishable things, such as silver or gold, <sup>19</sup>but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish or defect, the blood of Christ. (1 Pet. 1:17-19)*

#### **IV. If God's Saving Grace is at Work in Your Life, You will Take Hold of God's Grace and Refuse to Let Go**

*Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. <sup>4</sup>He instructed them: "This is what you are to say to my master Esau: 'Your servant Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now. <sup>5</sup>I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, menservants and maidservants. Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes.'"*

*<sup>6</sup>When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, "We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."*

*<sup>7</sup>In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. <sup>8</sup>He thought, "If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape."*

*<sup>9</sup>Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,' <sup>10</sup>I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. <sup>11</sup>Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. <sup>12</sup>But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'"*

*<sup>13</sup>He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: <sup>14</sup>two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, <sup>15</sup>thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. <sup>16</sup>He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, "Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds."*

*<sup>17</sup>He instructed the one in the lead: "When my brother Esau meets you and asks, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?' <sup>18</sup>then you are to say, 'They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us.'"*

*<sup>19</sup>He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: "You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. <sup>20</sup>And be sure to say, 'Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.'" For he thought, "I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will*

receive me.”<sup>21</sup> So Jacob’s gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp.

<sup>22</sup> That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. <sup>23</sup> After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. <sup>24</sup> So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. <sup>25</sup> When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. <sup>26</sup> Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.” But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” <sup>27</sup> The man asked him, “What is your name?” “Jacob,” he answered. <sup>28</sup> Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.” <sup>29</sup> Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.” But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there. <sup>30</sup> So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”

<sup>31</sup> The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. <sup>32</sup> Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob’s hip was touched near the tendon. (Gen. 32:3-32)

In Genesis 31:11-13 there is recorded God’s instruction to Jacob: *“the angel of God said to me in the dream, Jacob. And I said, Here am I. <sup>12</sup> And he said, ... <sup>13</sup> I am the God of Beth-el, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now get up and leave this land and return to the land of your birth.”* In obedient response to God’s command, Jacob prepares to leave Paddan Aram and return to Canaan: *“Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him”* (Gen. 32:1.)

As he approaches Canaan, and receives the report that Esau is advancing towards him with 400 men, Jacob is distressed with fear (Gen. 32:6-7.) Jacob turns to the LORD and humbly appeals to His covenant mercies (vs. 9-12.)

In response to his prayer, Jacob has a mysterious encounter with God in which he wrestles with the Angel of the LORD (vs. 24-32.) Jacob’s wrestling with the Angel is the physical counterpart to his previous wrestling with God in prayer. Jacob’s whole spiritual life is defined in his declaration, *“I will not let You go, unless You bless me”* (vs. 26.) Even though he has been exposed to a life-threatening situation, (encountering Esau with his 400 men,)—in consequence of obeying the LORD’s command to return to Canaan—and, also, because he finds himself in an incapacitated state, both physically and spiritually—as symbolized by the LORD putting his hip out of joint—Jacob tenaciously clings to the LORD his only Savior. His act of faith is in harmony with the testimony of the Psalmist:

*Whom have I in heaven except you? And there is no one on earth whom I desire besides you. <sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart faint; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever. <sup>27</sup> Those who are far from you shall perish. You have destroyed all those who act like harlots, being unfaithful to you. <sup>28</sup> But it is*

*good for me to be near to God. I have made the Lord Jehovah my refuge, so that I may tell of all your works.* (Psl. 73:25-28)

If God's saving grace is at work in your life, you will take hold of God's grace and refuse to let go. From John 1:12-13 we are made to see that a genuine work of the Holy Spirit in one's life results not only in the initial receiving of Christ, but also in a continued trusting commitment to Him:

*But to all who **did receive him** [an initial act of faith, as is indicated by the aorist form of the Greek verb, λαμβάνω], **to those who are believing on his name** [a continuing faith and commitment, as is indicated by the present participle of the Greek verb, πιστεύω; we may translate it, "those who are believing," or, "those who are continuing to believe,"] **to them he gave the right to become children of God—<sup>13</sup>they were born, not by natural descent, nor by human will, nor by a husband's desire, but by God.** (Jn. 1:12-13)*

## **Conclusion**

Scripture teaches that Jacob, in distinction from Esau who was left to his own natural inclinations, was the subject of God's saving grace. When you examine Jacob's life as it is recorded in Scripture, you discover the distinctive trademark—the evidence—of God's work of saving grace: 1) an **active** desire for the divine blessing; 2) a respect for God's sacred covenant; 3) a holy, reverential fear of the LORD; and 4) a clinging to the God of grace and refusing to let go of Him.

As you examine your own live in the light of Scripture, may you either gain assurance and confidence that God's saving grace is at work in your life; or, may you pray that the LORD would perform His work of saving grace in you.