

You are Never Alone

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“Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it.” And he was afraid and said: “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven!” (Genesis 28:16-17)

The times when we are combatting evil desires that are pulling at us from hell can result in some of the loneliest moments of our lives. It’s not just the wrestling with negative cravings that brings on loneliness; it’s also the feelings of guilt and shame – and of course, often in the dread of night. These “spiritual storms” take our consciousness (our thoughts and feelings) and drive them into the dirt – into external, sometimes petty and shallow thinking. Reacting from that external state of mind causes us to feel alone and threatened.

The story of Jacob fleeing at night through the desert from his brother Esau’s murderous rage is an image that characterizes that sense of being brought into externals and therefore alone and vulnerable. The setting of the story in a desert night so perfectly conveys the sense we can have in temptation that our destruction is imminent. **But we are not alone.** And the impending feelings of doom are dark illusions infused on us from hell.

The truth is that when we struggle like this in temptation, conjoined with our efforts to follow the Lord’s leadership is a deep, strong level of support that we can hardly believe. While our conscious focus may be in an external place, and while we are feeling empty inside, the truth is that there is a lot going on in the internal levels of our spirit.

To see and understand this support, it is helpful to reflect on the meaning of the incredible dream Jacob had of the ladder. At its deepest level the story is about the **Lord Himself** and the Lord’s experiences as He was on earth conquering hell. It is important to know something about this inner understanding of the story of Jacob’s dream because it is in these experiences of the Lord’s life on Earth that we can see His True Power at play.

We can see that the forces that He faced and overthrew were much more severe and brutal than anything we face today – for His battle was much, much bigger. When Jesus lived on earth, He was standing up against the destruction of the entire human race. The glimpses we get of the Lord’s conquering in temptations while He was on earth are helpful because He allows us to use that same power in our own spiritual struggles. Once one sees how the story relates to the Lord, one can circle back and see

how the story also teaches us about our struggles in regeneration and the Lord's impact on us.

And so, you can say that this story of Jacob, his conflict with brother Esau, his dream, his flight, and his eventual fathering the children of Israel symbolized the Lord coming to earth and solving a global spiritual crisis. It was a time of complete spiritual darkness. The human race was so manipulated by hell that people had lost the ability to figure out how to live a good life. For example, people were at the point where they could not see the difference between the conditions for a healthy marriage and adultery. People didn't know how to differentiate between an act of mercy or hatred, or between justice and revenge. In addition to an absence of **understanding**, people were also drawn toward evil by overpowering forces from hell; simply sucked as if by the gravitational pull of an evil black hole.

The *Arcana Caelestia* describes the magnitude of the battle that the Lord fought when He came to earth. We read that **"in general the nature of a person's temptations is as the nature of his loves. This also shows the nature of the Lord's temptations, that these were the most dreadful of all, for as is the intensity of the love so is the dreadfulness of the temptations. The Lord's love - a most ardent love - was for the salvation of the whole human race; it was therefore a total affection for good and affection for truth in the highest degree. Against these all the hells contended, employing the most malicious forms of guile and venom, but the Lord nevertheless conquered them all by His own power."** (AC 1820)

It is difficult to grasp the breadth and intensity of these temptations. It is also hard to express the wonder that the Lord was able to conquer such adversity!

In addition, these battles were constant and unceasing with the Lord! We read: **"When the Lord was in the World, He continually fought against the hells and entirely subdued them. Hence He was made Justice. He thus redeemed from damnation those who receive Divine Good and Truth from Him. If this had not been done by Him, no flesh could have been saved!"** (AC 9937)

It is amazing to think that He did this incredible act of redemption without coercion, threats, or by orchestrating some global physical calamity. In fact, it was an act of pure mercy! He did it by shining the light of truth into a world of darkness, allowing people to see clearly the difference between the life of love (the life of heaven) and the life that leads to destruction - a life of hell.

Consider how the Lord references Himself as the Light: He said He was the true **Light** which gives **light** to everyone coming into the world (Jn. 1:9). And that He was "the **light** that shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." (Jn 1:5) He said He was the **light** of the world. He who follows Him shall not walk in darkness,

but have the **light** of life.” (Jn 8:12) He said that He had come *as* a **light** into the world, that whoever believes in Him should not abide in darkness (Jn 12:46).

These are all references to His revealing Divine Truth: showing the human race: **“the Divine Good as it presents itself visually in Heaven, that is, to the Angels.”** (AC 3704). This light is the true light that is the “light” of angels and man. It is the light of the heavens. And the light of our salvation. It is also the light that caused the Spiritual Sun to shine seven times greater at the time of the dawn of the New Church. The Lord bringing the light restored vision to the human race so they could see the difference between this Divine truth, and the destructive lies that lead to hell.

But the Lord restored more than light, He brought power to break away from the incredible gravitational pull of hell; a power that comes by aligning His truths with His Divine Love for the salvation of the human race. That so today even in the worst storms of temptation, the Lord’s power allows us to stand firm without being washed away.

The Jacob story, then, is at its inmost level, a prophecy teaching about what the Lord accomplished through His life on earth. He gave people the ability to see the difference between Spiritual Darkness and Light; Between corruption and healing; He restored the ability for people to choose between natural life and spiritual, heavenly life. And in so doing, the Lord showed us how bring His Divine Power into our lives to save us from fury of temptation. So, looking at this deepest level of Jacob’s dream, we can see the Lord on earth, uniting his Inner Soul (Jehovah) with Himself and so uniting Divine Goodness with Divine Truth and offering us the power to be saved. This is, at its deepest level, the inner meaning of Jacob’s ladder.

But the dream isn’t just about the Lord’s own battles against the entirety of hell. The dream casts light on our own individual spiritual journeys as well – and, as such, it serves as a particular reminder that **WE ARE NEVER ALONE IN OUR SPIRITUAL BATTLES!**

The dream shows us the miraculous inner workings of the Lord with all the angelic connections He has with us. It is a reminder that human beings are constantly in the subconscious presence of angels and spirits every moment of every day. In fact, all our thoughts and feelings are tied in with, and influenced by angelic spirits in living in the spiritual world. In this environment, it is actually an illusion of the senses that we have thoughts and feelings that feel “private” to us alone and are not a part of this shared inner universe. We are taught that this is even true with our physical actions, for the book “Heaven and Hell” teaches us that a person cannot take a single step without the cooperation of angels.

It is worth noting that it may be that these angels that are associated with us are not strangers; rather, they are actual friends and family whom we have known and

loved who crossed over to the other side before us. They are real people, all, who have lived life in this world and now are serving the Lord as angels in heaven. But the chief interest of the angels is not in our physical steps. Like the Lord Himself, their interest is in our salvation. They are there to help connect our concepts of truth with the desire to serve others and help with the goodness of life. So think of the angels in the dream, as old friends ascending and descending from the Lord, who are carefully touching our affections, moderating our thoughts and bending us toward good.

It can be heartening to remember that even in those times when we feel alone in temptation, the reality is far, far different. It's like the words of Elisha reminding us that we need not fear for "those who are with us are more than those who are with them." (II Kings 6:16) And the Lord is right there with us, fighting with his omnipotent, unceasing love for our eternal salvation - a love which He has proven is stronger than the entirety of Hell.

And with the Lord, and the influence of His angels, we are being **changed** through this delicate process with the angels ascending and descending, quietly reorienting our loves, changing our attitudes and connecting affections to new insights that come from the Lord's Word. This sense of community to help others get through temptation also reflects part of the purposes of the church. The church is also to act as an angelic community providing natural support to help people through dark times.

And so, remember that you are not alone. Stand firm! When the dawn comes things will look different. We can get up in the warm morning light and declare that **Surely the Lord is in this place and we did not know it! "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven!"** (Genesis 28:16,17)"

Lessons: Genesis 28:10-17, Luke 9:10-17, *True Christian Religion* 142 (portions)