

Going Back to Bethel

Genesis 35: 1-7

We have read a portion of the life of Jacob. His life was filled with many twists and turns. We all know of the turmoil that existed within the family as he was growing up. Isaac loved and favored Esau and Rebekah loved and favored Jacob. As Isaac grew old and was preparing to pass on the blessing associated with the birthright, Jacob devised a plan to steal the blessing from Esau. Jacob was forced to flee Canaan because Esau sought to kill him.

As he made his way to the land of Padanaram, where Rebekah's people dwelt, he met the Lord and made a vow unto Him, [Gen.28:18-22](#). Jacob had spent 20 years working for his uncle and is now back in Canaan. His life has faced adversity and he has not kept his vow unto the Lord. Our text finds Jacob facing the Lord in regard to his vow. God had been faithful as He promised and yet Jacob had neglected the Lord. His life was in turmoil once again. Jacob finally realizes the need to fulfill his obligations to the Lord.

There is great application in this passage for our lives as well. No doubt there are some here today who started out well. Think back to the time when the Lord saved you. Consider the joy that you once had. You were convinced that nothing would ever change the way you felt about the Lord. But sadly, over time, the joy is gone. You are no longer living for the Lord as you once did. The vows you made to God have been left unfulfilled. If that is the case, there is hope for you. God is calling you to return to Bethel. I want to point out the truths involved in: [Going Back to Bethel](#). (As we look at this passage, keep in mind that Bethel means "house of God." This is where Jacob met the Lord. We need to get back to the place where we met Him.)

I. The Call Revealed (1) – [And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.](#) There are several aspects that we need to consider concerning the call. First it was:

A. A Personal Call – We find that God spoke directly to Jacob. He didn't deal with Leah or Rachel; He came to Jacob. He was the one who had made the vow. He was the head of the home and this was his responsibility.

- The same is true in our lives. Salvation is a personal experience. We must all deal individually with the Lord. Our service to Him is no different. We all have personal responsibilities to God. He may burden others to pray for us, but He will deal with us personally concerning our lives.
- You alone are responsible for the life you live. You may not be where the Lord would have you be and blame others for that, but you must heed the call of God in your life.

B. A Progressive Call – God gave a call that involved a couple steps. If Jacob was to get back to Bethel, he had to follow God’s plan. Notice:

1. The Direction – [Arise, go up to Bethel](#). The Lord called Jacob to arise and got to Bethel. There was no question as to where he must go. The Lord was not vague or unclear with His command.

- God will speak to us in the same manner. He has a plan for each of our lives. He has a direction that we are to follow.
- Many times we hear the call of God and are unwilling to respond. Many have missed the Lord because they were unwilling to follow His call.
- I suppose that I am “narrow minded” and old fashioned, but I don’t believe that we can be in the will of God in two different places. We are either where God wants us or not. It is that simple. (God’s perfect will and His permissive will. The problem with a “permissive will” is that it subjects God to our desires. He is not limited or bound by our wants in life.)
- Notice also that God said, [Arise, go up to Bethel](#). Jacob had to get up and make a journey upward. God will never lead us downhill. His way is always best and it will always lead upward. If your life is going downhill, it is a good sign that you have missed the Lord. You just need to get back to Bethel.

2. The Dwelling – [Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there](#). Once Jacob got to Bethel, he was to dwell there. This means “*to remain, abide, stay; to make one’s abode.*” This was not to be a temporary dwelling. It was not to be a place that Jacob visited from time to time; it was to be his permanent dwelling place. He was to remain at Bethel.

- We have heard the same call. God has called us to dwell at Bethel. We have not been called to be in and out or up and down. We were adopted into the family when we were saved and we are expected at the Father’s house. You cannot live for God and please Him if you neglect His house!

C. A Pointed Call (1b) – [and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother](#). Once Jacob arrived at Bethel, he had specific instructions on what to do. He was to build an altar unto the Lord. He knew what God expected.

- People often wonder what God wants from their lives. They act as if there is no way to know what God desires. We have His blessed Word to lead us. If you want to know what God desires for you, read His Word.
- Jacob was instructed to build an altar at Bethel. This represents several things to us. Each of these should be evident in our lives as well.

- **Worship** – The altar is always representative of worship. The first mention of worship is in [Gen.22:5](#). An altar was involved.
- **Obedience** – Jacob had to do as God commanded. When we lay ourselves, our hindrances, and our cares on the altar, we are obedient.
- **Sacrifice** – In Jacob's day the altar was always a place of sacrifice. Blood was shed and an offering made. We no longer offer blood sacrifices, but our altars must remain a place of sacrifice. We must sacrifice ourselves to God.
- **Obligation** – Consider all that God had done for Jacob. There was no question that Jacob was obligated unto the Lord. Jesus paid our sin debt. We can't repay that, but we are obligated to serve Him. He has been good!

I. The Call Revealed (1)

II. The Change Required (2-4) – Before Jacob and his family could go to Bethel some things needed to be addressed and some changes made. The changes that Jacob made must be evident in our lives as well.

A. Submission (2a) – [Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you.](#) Clearly this was an issue that Jacob was aware of but had been reluctant to deal with. Rachel, his beloved wife, had brought idols out of her homeland when they fled from her father. [Gen.31:34 – Now Rachel had taken the images, and put them in the camel's furniture, and sat upon them. And Laban searched all the tent, but found them not.](#) Jacob knew that if they were to go to Bethel, all must submit wholly to the Lord. He alone was to be their God.

- I don't know of any in our day that worship idols like these, but we do allow other things to come before us and the Lord. There are things in life that we place priority on above the Lord. It may be our families, our jobs, our possessions, or even our hobbies. If we are to get back to Bethel and serve the Lord, He alone must be God in our lives. We must completely submit to Him. [Col. 3:1-2 – If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.](#)

B. Sanctification (2b) – [and be clean, and change your garments.](#) Jacob also knew there must be cleansing if they were to meet with God at Bethel. Their lives needed to be cleaned up and their garments changed.

- This is a picture of sanctification. It involves taking inventory of our lives and becoming clean before the Lord. There must be an inward cleansing that only God can see. We must

deal with the issues that hinder us from fellow-ship and worship. Cleansing needs to be done on a routine basis. If we neglect our daily cleansing, we will soon become dirty.

- Also there must be an outward cleansing. When we get our hearts right with God it will be evident for all to see. We will no longer live as we once did. We will lay aside the garments that are spotted by the world for garments that honor the Lord. How long has it been since you took inventory and had a spiritual cleansing? Maybe it is about time.

C. Separation (4) – [And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.](#) Jacob's family gave him all that hindered them in their walk with God. He then did a strange, but necessary thing. Jacob hid those things; he literally buried them under an oak tree so that they would no longer be a temptation or part of their lives. Jacob created a separation from the idols of life.

- I am convinced that there are Christians who need to get rid of some things in their lives and bury them for good. They need to be abandoned, buried, and walked away from. We cannot be pleasing unto God if we continually go back to the things that hinder our walk with Him. Just give it to the Lord.

I. The Call Revealed (1)

II. The Change Required (2-4)

III. The Comfort Received (5-7) – Jacob's obedience and submission brought blessing and comfort. Notice:

A. The Hedge (5) – [And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.](#) Canaan at this time was still occupied by hostile enemies. They sought to defeat and destroy Jacob. He would've been vulnerable as he traveled with his family had it not been for God's protective hedge.

- There is benefit to serving the Lord. Our lives are not without trouble, but I rejoice for the hedge that the people of God have. We face a determined adversary, but he is restricted by God. He is only allowed to go as far as God permits. Walking in the way of the Lord is a good way to ensure that hedge. Satan cannot prevent you from getting back to Bethel.

B. The Harmony (6) – [So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him.](#) Jacob made it to Bethel with his entire family. Not a one was lost or turned back. Jacob's family as a whole was making their way to the house of God.

- This presents a great spiritual truth. I know that the decision to accept Christ and serve Him is personal, but we our obedience will have a significant impact on our families. If we will set the standard, especially the fathers, our children will be influenced to follow. When they are brought to Bethel, they will likely remain at Bethel. They will be far less likely to abandon the ways of God for the ways of the world.

C. The Hope (7) – [And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.](#) Jacob was reminded of the faithfulness of God in his life. He built the altar and worshipped the Lord. No doubt this was a defining moment in Jacob's life. He finally reached Bethel and kept his vow. God had been patient and continued to work in his life even when Jacob was unaware and even when Jacob was unconcerned. His hope was renewed.

- There is hope in the Lord for all who seek Him. We just need to get to where God is. This passage has given us the blueprint for personal revival. Some are wandering in a distant land apart from God and away from His house. God would be just to leave us there, but He loves us too much. He is waiting patiently for those who have made a vow to get back to Bethel and serve Him.

How is your heart today? I am certain that God has spoken to hearts through His Word. You have heard the call; will you respond? We must take inventory of our lives and see where we stand with the Lord. I assure you that God will place that hedge about you so that you can return unto Him. The adversary is telling you to wait, but God is patiently waiting. Why not submit to the Lord and return unto Him? Please come as He leads.