

## Get to Bethel

Genesis 34:30 – 35:15

5/04/08

### Intro

Last week we left Jacob as he was leaving his uncle Laban's after getting wives and children and flocks. He sent word to Esau that he was on the way and then heard that Esau was coming out to meet him and there were 400 men with him. Fortunately, this part of the story ended well as it turned out to be a touching reunion.

But upon entering the land he was called to, he didn't go to Bethel, but to Succoth instead and even built a house there, though God had called him to live in tents as a sojourner in that land. Later, he pitched his tent near Shechem, a worldly city, and even bought some land there.

And that's when things went bad quickly. Dinah, Jacob's daughter went into town to make some friends and a young man, also named Shechem, found her and raped her. Finally when the brothers found out about what had happened they convinced the men of the city to get circumcised and then on the third day when they were in pain, Simeon and Levi came to the city and destroyed every man and plundered the town, taking everything of value.

Jacob was greatly troubled at what they had done and so he said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble by making me to stink among the people of this land."

And that's where we start our study today. The flesh stinks! Wouldn't it be great if we smelled like the great outdoors? But no, the flesh stinketh. Why? To make it clear that we need help! Here God speaks to Jacob and brings the help he needs; here are lessons we all need.

## I. Get to the House of God

- Verse 1, “Get up and go to Bethel,” God said to Jacob. That was the place where God revealed Himself to Jacob and showed him a ladder from earth to heaven; and God blessed him there.
- It was also the place that Jacob, in awe of God’s presence, said was God’s house, and that there he would build an altar.

### A. Now stay there

- It’s absolutely vital that we see the words, “and live there!”
- We are the ones that make a mess of our lives, but God makes it so clear what we are to do, *get to the house of God and stay there!*
- Jacob had told God that he would come back to that place, yet he had been back in the land for 8-10 years. He wasn’t living in the center of God’s will at all; he had pitched his tent toward a worldly place and even bought land. He was getting comfortable in the wrong place!
- **But it was there that Jacob had been refreshed and it was there he knew that God was for him and it was there God wanted him to stay!**

**Psalm 34:8, O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!**

**Palms 27:4, One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord**

**all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple.**

- The Lord said to the church, “return to your first love!” In another place He said ...

**Jeremiah 2:2, Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: “I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert,”**

- The key is to be settled in spirit, to be at home in the house of God.

**B. Put away the foreign gods**

- It’s interesting to see that Jacob didn’t need to be told to put away foreign idols. He knew that when God called him back to the house of God, he needed to get rid of those idols.
- Verse 4 seems to say that there were quite a few idols in the family. How did this happen? Rachel, one of Jacob’s wives, took her father’s idols as they were leaving, so the boys probably took the idols from Shechem.
- What is an idol today? Anything that gets in the way of your relationship to God.
- It’s an unwise investment to invest in idols. They don’t satisfy, they become obstacles, and when we chase after empty things, we ourselves become empty...

**Jeremiah 2:5, Thus says the Lord, “What injustice did your fathers find in Me, that they went far from Me and walked after emptiness and became empty?**

- Another question to ask is; can an idol save in times of trouble? **Where is Michelob when you need him?**

**Jeremiah 2:9-13 Broken cisterns that hold no water**

**Illus – Our idols are a bad investment. When I was 17 I bought what I thought was the car of my dreams. My problem was that I bought it because I thought girls would like me more. The problem was that it fell apart and then when I stated dating Jordi, it made the exactly opposite impression.**

- Perhaps a question could be, is there any difference between our lives and the world around us? Are we watching the same things as the world, are we listening to the same things as the world?

**Illus – An old hymn captures it well... Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace.**

**C. Purify the heart; change the garments**

- Verses 2, the next thing Jacob said was to purify themselves and to change their garments.
- The point seems to be clear, that putting away an idol is a first step, but getting an idol out of our hearts must follow. What good is it unless the thing is out of our hearts?

- Jesus rightly said that the question of the heart is the most important question of all...

**Matthew 12:34-36, “For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil.”**

- Jacob also told them to change their garments. The garments become stained and start to smell like wherever we’ve been.

**Illus – When I used to work in the restaurant my clothes always smelled when I came home.**

- In Colossians 3, Paul makes a similar point...

**Colossians 3:5-17 a spiritual change of garments**

- So they have to Jacob all their foreign gods and he buried them under the oak near Shechem.

<b>II. Be Altared in God’s House</b>
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- So they headed to Bethel, 30 miles to the south. When they arrived Jacob built an altar.
- Building an altar was to worship God and give Him first place in his heart.
- And in the process, we are the ones who are changed, altered if you will, when we worship, when we place God as the center of our lives.

A. He has watched over you

- Coming back to Bethel was to come back to the place where Jacob had first encountered God. It

was there that God promised to be with him and bless him wherever he traveled.

- Coming back to Bethel, coming back to the house of God, it was clear that God indeed had been watching over his life.
- Even when Jacob's heart wasn't where it should have been, God was watching over his life.

**Illus – A couple years ago I was driving through the area where I grew up and had a flashback of a time when I was racing a neighbor boy in my Javelin. 30 years later, it finally hit me how incredibly foolish I had been and how badly that could have turned out. God was watching over me.**

**Illus – Later when I was in seminary and was taking two Greek classes at the same time, God was watching over me.**

**Psalm 127:2, It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for it is He who gives to His beloved even while he sleeps.**

- When you look back and see God's hand in your life, through the good and the bad, you realize that He is worthy to be honored, worthy to be worshiped.

**Illus – Once when I had a sore throat and still had another service to go, I thought I would just move my lips to the words instead of truly singing. It was interesting. There is a great difference between going through the motions and truly giving God our heart.**

B. God meant what He said

- It's so interesting to see what happened next in the story. After Jacob has the family purify their hearts, change their garments and he builds an altar to the Lord, he has another encounter with God where God again changes his name to Israel.
- God meant it when He said it the first time, but Jacob didn't change his name, so God met him again and changed his name.
- In verse 1, God told him to go to the house of God and live there, but one of the most tragic verses is found in verse 16, because it says, "Then they journeyed from Bethel."
- And the very next thing is the story of a tragedy.

**App – God meant it when he called him Israel, He meant it when He said to stay in the house of God.**

**We also need to stay in the house of God, we need to stay where God wants us, in the center of His will, if not; tragedy follows.**

**Psalm 84:1-12 How lovely are your dwelling places.**