

GOD, JACOB, AND BETHEL
Gen. 35:1-7

Intro: It should be recognized by every child of God that there is nothing that has to do with our lives and with our fellowship with the Lord and with our witness in the world, but what we can find all of the teaching that we need in the Word of God.

One great truth we need to keep in mind: Isa. 55:8, 9,
"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Let us place this truth along side of what we see of the world in its need tonight -- and more especially the need that we see in our own country! How gracious God has been to us -- blessing us as no other country on the earth has been blessed. You could not get the world to believe it but undoubtedly this has been to a great extent because of the testimony there has been in this country in the past for the Word of God and for the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in particular.

Moral corruption has long been a way of life with us, but lately it seems to have increased at an alarming rate. We no longer stand for what is right; we stand for liberty -- which in our corrupt society means that every man must be free to do what he wants to do -- whatever that might be!

God has given us many warnings. We can no longer talk about the judgment of God coming; it is here! We are just too blind to see it.

Although no one seems to be saying it, our great need is for God. Ours is a spiritual need. Men need the Gospel, they need Christ, they need to be turned away from their sins.

But how will this happen? Does the Word have the answer? It surely does. And what we need to do is to stop listening to men's plans and get back to the Word to find out what God has to say. Regardless of how corrupt the times may get, the Word tells us the ways of God for the work of God!

Therefore, I want to consider our text tonight in two separate messages -- tonight and next Sunday night. I trust that this will be preparation for our Missionary Conference. We need to be burdened for the world in its need. But we seem to have divided the work of God into two

areas: home and foreign. If it is foreign, we call it missions; if it is home we call it evangelism. And so often our conception of the two is completely different. THEY ARE NOT DIFFERENT! THE WORK IS ONE. THE PRINCIPLES EMPLOYED ARE THE SAME. So, whether we are talking about Portland or Portugal, let us see how the Word can help us.

In the case of Jacob, let us note the result first.

I. THE RESULT: GEN. 35:5.

Somehow, in some way, God was with His people, and the heathen all around knew it.

This is one thing which seems to be missing today.

Take two NT examples:

- 1) The cry of the Philippian Jailor in Acts 16:30,
"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"
- 2) The instruction of the Apostle Peter in 1 Pet. 3:15, purposely omitting the first part of the verse for the moment,

" . . . and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

Have you ever had anyone do this? Perhaps the reason more have not is because we have ignored the first part of the verse:

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts . . ."

Men need to recognize that there is a God, that He is a holy God, that He will not tolerate sin, and that the wages of sin is death -- eternal death -- from which no man can escape except through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ!!!

But how can we see this happen in our generation? Perhaps what God said to Jacob can help us.

Let us just look at Gen. 35:1 tonight; next Sunday, the Lord willing, we will consider v. 2.

You will see very clearly that the first thing God told Jacob to be concerned about was:

II. JACOB'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

There are three things for us to see:

- 1) Where God told Jacob to go.
- 2) How long Jacob was to be there.
- 3) The first thing he was to do.

This clearly indicates that, if God is going to reach

the world, He is going to start with His people!

A. "And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel."

It is interesting to note that even the geography of the OT has spiritual significance. When Abraham went out of Canaan into Egypt, he went down. Cf. Gen. 12:10. He went down geographically, but also down spiritually. When he left Egypt, he went up. Cf. Gen. 13:1.

When God told Jacob to go to Bethel, it meant going UP -- geographically and spiritually.

What did Bethel mean?

1. It meant going to the house of God (which is the meaning of Bethel).

He was to go where he would find God, where God was dwelling.

Jacob had been there before -- on his way to find safety from Esau's hatred. God had met with him. And so it also meant other things:

2. It meant getting back to the truths which had been impressed upon Jacob's heart at that time.

Cf. Gen. 28:13-15. You will find five things. None has to do with Jacob's work or obedience; all had to do with what Jacob needed to know about God -- and believe. They are:

- a. The God of the past (Gen. 28:13a).
- b. The God of promise (Gen. 28:13b, 14).

We are so anxious to be doing that we forget what God wants to do for us.

- c. The God Who is present (Gen. 28:15a).
- d. The God of power (Gen. 28:15m).
- e. The God of purpose (Gen. 28:15b).

How different our lives would be if we really lived in the light of these great truths!

B. "And dwell there."

How often we go to Bethel when we are in need or we see others in need. How different it is to live there!

This is the emphasis in Psa. 23:6 and Psa. 27:4.

But we need the last statement before we close.

C. "And make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee."

The altar and Bethel were linked together from Abraham's day on. Cf. Gen. 12:8; 13:3, 4.

What is the significance of the altar?

- 1) It was a place of worship.
 - 2) It was a place of fellowship.
 - 3) It was a place of dedication.
 - 4) It was a place of thanksgiving.
 - 5) It was a place of confession and forgiveness.
- And there are many other things that can be said about it.

Concl: Now we can see what God blessed Jacob and his family as He did. And it is written here in Gen. 35 to teach us how God can prepare us to leave our mark upon the generation in which we live. God has not changed. Nor have His ways changed. And man has not changed. His basic need is still the same -- the need for a Savior.

Let us take these to heart and let the Spirit of God use these in our lives.

THE FIRST STEP TO BLESSING FOR YOURSELF, AND TO USEFULNESS IN THE WORLD, IS TO BE TAKEN TOWARD GOD:

- 1) Where we can be with Him.
- 2) Where we can learn of Him.
- 3) Where we can dwell with Him. What blessings we miss because we are not faithful.
- 4) Where we can worship Him.

No one can possibly tell what the Lord is going to do with our country, or in our country. We must leave that with Him, but praying every day for His mercy. But one thing is certain: IF WE ARE GOING TO SEE HIS BLESSING -- PERSONALLY AND AS A CHURCH -- IT IS GOING TO BEGIN WITH US! After that, it is in the Lord's hands. But there is no limit to the possibilities. May God grant that His blessing may come!