

=FAVORITE BIBLE CHAPTERS=

Lesson 55

Genesis 35

INTRODUCTION: The word “Bethel” means “the house of God”; “Beth” means “house,” and “el” means “God.” It was the place that became sacred in the life of Jacob. It represents our conversion experience, the place where we were saved, the place where we really got right with God, the place where we gave all, etc. The entire lesson will be wrapped around this little place called Bethel and Jacob’s experiences there.

I. THE SIN. Jacob committed a sin that caused him to have to leave home. Jacob once traded a bowl of soup for the birthright which was supposed to go to the firstborn son, who in this case was a tired and weary Esau. Later, when Isaac was an old man and had lost his sight, he called for Esau to bring him venison and prepare it just like he enjoyed it. Rebekah, their mother, overheard; she schemed with Jacob to pretend he was Esau. Since Isaac was blind, Jacob deceived him and received the blessing that belonged to Esau. In Genesis 27:41, Esau vowed that he would kill Jacob for this sin. Because of this sin, Rebekah arranged to have Jacob sent back to Padan-aram to get a bride from the daughters of Laban, Rebekah’s brother, lest he should marry some heathen woman among the Canaanites. So Jacob’s sin caused him to run from the anger of his brother. He left home and headed for Padan-aram. (Teacher, stress the importance of right living and the wages of sin. Show how that it looked good to Jacob to get the birthright and the blessings, but he paid for it by having to leave home and those who were dear to him.)

II. THE LONELINESS. It was a sad journey for Jacob. He had to leave his mother whom he loved. He had to leave the familiar scenes of home. He had no money, no company. When nighttime came, he came close to a place called Luz. It was time to go to bed, or at least go to sleep, but he had no place to sleep. He had no inn, no home, no friends, no warm bed. He simply gathered some rocks together and used them for a pillow and went to sleep on the ground. (Teacher, stress the loneliness of sin. Jacob was riding high when he got his brother’s birthright. He was riding high when he got the blessing which was not rightly his, but he came to the place where all people arrive who go into sin. He came to the place of loneliness. This was the case in so many lives in the Bible. There was Lot, lonely after the destruction of Sodom. There was the prodigal son, lonely in the hog pen eating the husks of the corn, etc.)

III. THE PLACE. As Jacob slept as a sad and lonely youth, he dreamed. In his dream Heaven opened, and a ladder was set up which reached from earth to Heaven. The angels of God ascended and descended, and God stood above the ladder. Genesis 28:13-15, “And, behold, the LORD stood above it and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.” Jacob woke up. He was shaken in his soul. He was overcome with the glory of God’s presence. Genesis 28:17, “And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” So, God was there. Ah, this is a wonderful truth! God is with His children. Jacob was backslidden; nevertheless, God was with him. Jacob was lonely, but God was with him. (Teacher, stress the point here that God is always with His people and that no matter where they go, they are seen by God. God sees their good; God sees their bad. God sees their sin. God knows what they do.)

IV. THE CHURCH. Genesis 28:18, 19, “And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called

the name of that place Beth-el: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first.” Notice the word “Beth-el.” It means “the house of God.” As soon as Jacob got right with God, he made a house of God. When people are right with God, the house of God takes proper place in their lives. How important it is that people build their lives around the church and make it the central place of their activities!

V. THE VOWS. Genesis 28:20-22, “And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.” Jacob made three vows for his life. On the basis that God would do what He had said, would care for his needs and bring him again to his father’s house in peace, Jacob made three promises. Let us notice these promises.

1. Jacob promised that God would be his God. Look at Genesis 28:21b, “...then shall the LORD be my God.” Probably this is the time when Jacob first knew salvation, had his sins forgiven and opened his heart to the saving grace of God. Probably this is the place where Jacob really became a child of God. There is some doubt about this. Many think, and perhaps justly so, that he was saved before this. Others think that this was the place where he was saved. (Teacher, stop a few minutes here and teach the plan of salvation. Go through the Romans Road—Romans 3:10; 3:23; 5:12; 6:23; 5:8; 10:9-13. Lead the pupils to know they are saved.)

2. Jacob vowed that he would be faithful to the house of God. On the stone that had been his pillow, he poured oil (a symbol of the Holy Spirit). Henceforth this place was to be to him the house of God, so he called it Beth-el, the name by which it has been called for nearly 4,000 years. (Teacher, stress here the importance of the church in the life of a pupil. Also notice the word “oil” and stress the importance of the Holy Spirit. Teach for a little bit how the Holy Spirit leads us, teaches us the Bible, helps us to know God’s will, comforts us. Show that He is a person Who is with us all the time, Who indwells us and wants to be recognized as such.)

3. one’s gross income to the Lord. Explain to the class how God blesses the tither. You might even give some tithing Scriptures such as Malachi 3:8-10; I Corinthians 16:1, 2, etc. Maybe you would want to have a few testimonies concerning what tithing is really all about and the blessings of tithing.)

(Teacher, since we have discussed the “place” and the “vows,” ask the pupils to talk for a few minutes about the place where they were saved. Have them give a testimony ever so briefly. Especially have them tell the place. Find out where their “Beth-el” is.)

VI. THE CALL. Twenty-eight years after Jacob’s experience at Beth-el, God appeared unto him. Genesis 35:1, “And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.” God was calling Jacob back to Beth-el. God wants us to go back to our first love. He wants us to live as close to Him as we were the moment we got saved. However, Jacob did not go back to Beth-el. Rather, he stayed away. While he was gone, Jacob joined Laban’s household, and he fell in love with Rachel. He worked seven years for her but was cheated by being given the wrong girl, Leah. (Teacher, show the pupils here that we will reap what we sow. Jacob had tricked his brother; now he was tricked. He had schemed against his father; now someone schemed against him. He had gotten that which wasn’t his; now he got that which he didn’t want.)

Jacob still loved Rachel, and he worked seven more years for her. How tragic it is that Jacob so long neglected the house of God! He forgot that place of his vows and promises, yet the call was always there to come back to Beth-el, come back to Beth-el, come back to Beth-el. He had been a long time away from the place of blessing.

VII. THE REAPING. Staying away from Beth-el causes awful things to take place. Several of these terrible things took place in the life of Jacob.

1. Jacob's daughter went wrong. Jacob bought a piece of ground at Shalem. He made his home there. It was only 20 miles from Beth-el! How tragic to be so close to Beth-el and yet not go back there! He stayed away from the place of blessing. His daughter went out to see some of the daughters of the land. Here a young prince saw her and led her into sin. Jacob is paying for his sin in being away from Beth-el.

2. Jacob had wild, wicked sons. They too had been away from Beth-el. Not only did Jacob's backsliding cause him to pay, but his sons had to pay. When they heard of their sister's ruin, they made a scheme of getting revenge. They pretended to be friends with the young prince and with his father and the city of Shalem, but rather, they came upon the city and killed every man; they looted the city and took the spoils. You will find Jacob's opinion of this in Genesis 49:5-7. "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel." Now Jacob has a daughter whose purity is gone and sons whose decency is gone.

3. Jacob married idolatrous women. He was away from Beth-el, so he married outside Beth-el. His sons were away from the house of God, so they married outside the house of God. His two wives, Rachel and Leah, daughters of Laban, worshipped idols. Rachel stole her father's idols and took them away with her. In fact, when Jacob came back to Beth-el, he knew about these strange gods and had them put away. Genesis 35:2, 4, "Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: 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."

Still, the call back to Beth-el was coming. God wants Jacob back in Beth-el, just as God wants every Christian in the house of God. He wants every Christian to tithe. He wants every Christian to serve Him. (Teacher, take a few moments here to discuss marrying the right kind of person, going with the right kind of person. Show the importance of being in the will of God in order that our children might be in the will of God. How vitally important this is in the lives of young people!)

VIII. THE RETURN. Finally Jacob decided to return to Beth-el. Genesis 35:2-4, "Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: And let us arise, and go up to Beth-el; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. 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." Notice how he came back to Beth-el.

1. He put away his idols. (Teacher, discuss idols. An idol is that thing which we put above God. An idol is that thing in our lives which keeps us from serving God. It is the object of our affection above the Lord. It could be a job, a sport, a hobby, food, clothes, education. Nothing should come before God!)

2. They washed themselves and changed their garments. In other words, they became clean. (Teacher, talk to the pupils here about clean living, keeping one's self unspotted from the world. Not only should we clean up to go back to Beth-el, but Beth-el will help make us clean!)

3. They took off their earrings. Now there was nothing wrong with wearing earrings. "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," Genesis 35:4. God did not say it was wrong to wear earrings, and God did not tell them to leave off their earrings; but these earrings represented something more than that. They represented the women dressing like the world. They had worn the type earrings of the world, and the earrings had become too important to them. Christian

women are commanded that their adorning should not be that outward adorning but rather the inner hidden man of the heart. I Peter 3:3, 4, “Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.” (Teacher, stress here the importance of young ladies dressing properly and avoiding the over-painting of the face, the excess of jewelry, ridiculous and worldly hairdos. Discuss miniskirts and the wearing of garments pertaining to a man. Teach the girls to be ladies. Teach them to be Christlike. Teach them to be feminine.)

IX. BETHEL BECAME EL-BETHEL. Here is an interesting point. When Jacob got back to Bethel, he was so happy to get back! He was so excited that he changed the name of the place from Bethel to El-beth-el. See Genesis 35:7. Bear in mind that “Beth” means house; “el” means God. It was the house of God. Now it is “the God of the house of God.” How beautiful that is! When Jacob came to the house of God, he fell in love with the God of the house of God. This is what the house of God is really for, to help us fall in love with God all over again.

CONCLUSION: After Jacob’s death, Beth-el was still a sacred spot. It soon became known as Beth-el again. In other words, God’s name was taken off the front and it started a downward trend in the minds of the people. Then, the “el” was taken off the end and it was called “Beth” for a while, just meaning “a house,” God no longer having anything to do with it. In later years it became known as Beth-aven; “Beth” meaning “house” and “aven” meaning “emptiness.” It was the “house of emptiness.” We must work constantly to see that our church keeps the power and breath of God on it and that God’s blessings are poured out upon us. It can be so if our emphasis is always upon El-beth-el, the God of the house of God.