

Jacob Moves to Bethel

by Chuck Smith

God calls Jacob to return to Bethel, the place of his first encounter, to make a commitment to serve Him and to be a prince of God.

Duration: 25:09

Scripture: Genesis 35:1, Ephesians 2:4

Topics: "Jacob"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor Chuck Smith discusses Jacob's move to Bethel as described in Genesis 35:1. God instructs Jacob to go to Bethel and dwell there. Jacob takes a strong spiritual stand and tells his family to get rid of their foreign gods and cleanse themselves. Pastor Chuck emphasizes the importance of prioritizing God's word in our lives and the patience of God in waiting for us to turn back to Him. He encourages listeners to remember that no matter how far they may feel from peace, they are only one step away from God.

Transcript

Oh, let the Son of God enfold you With His Spirit and His love Let Him fill your heart and satisfy your soul
Oh, let Him have the things that mold you And His Spirit like a dove Will descend upon your life And make you whole
As we pick up today in Genesis, chapter 35, verse 1. And now, with today's lesson, here's Pastor Chuck Smith. Then God said to Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there. Then God said, when did God say it? When Jacob's family was falling apart.

His daughter had just been involved in an illicit relationship with Shechem, the son of Hamar. His sons had just committed a horribly vile crime. Deceitful, treacherous.

And when they were rebuked by their father Jacob, they gave no indication of repentance at all. Just more or less talked back to their dad. Their horrible crime brought a threat of extermination upon the family.

As word of what they had done went into the surrounding villages, surely they will be gathered together against Jacob to destroy him. And Jacob is afraid, and he knows that he must flee. It is at this point that God speaks to him.

Then God said to Jacob, Arise and go to Bethel. I think there's tremendous significance in going to Bethel. The first time that Jacob came to Bethel, he was fleeing for his life.

His brother Esau had vowed to kill him because he had deceived his father and then had stolen the blessing his father had intended for Esau. Esau had vowed to kill him. And so Jacob was fleeing for his life when he came to Bethel, grabbed a rock, went to sleep, had a vision of a ladder that reached up to heaven.

Angels of God ascending and descending on that ladder, and the Lord standing at the top of the ladder spoke to him and promised that he would be with him in his journey and that he would bring him back safely into this land and would prosper him. And in the morning when he awoke from the dream, he was conscious of the presence of God. For the first time he had a real personal encounter with God.

He said, Truly or surely God is in this place and I knew it not. Last night I didn't know it, but man I know it this morning. God is in this place.

And that was his first personal encounter with God. And when God is saying, Come back to Bethel, again he's fleeing for his life. And where does God direct him? Back to the place where he had his first personal encounter with God.

God said to Israel at a later time, as he was lamenting their lost love, he said, Where was the love of our espousal when I first brought you out of Egypt and you were in the wilderness and all you could talk about was me? Writing little graffiti all over the place about God, about God's love. Where is that love when I so filled your lives and your thoughts that all you could think about was me? Where is it? What happened? What did I do, God said, that you should turn away and forget me? Jesus, when he addressed himself to the church of Ephesus, he said, Oh, you've got all of your works, your labor, you're doing the things, but you're lacking one important thing. You've left your first love.

Remember from whence you were fallen. And God was bringing him back to Bethel, back to that place where he had made his commitment to God. For in the morning when he woke up and realized the presence of God, he prayed and he said, Lord, if you will go with me, if you will protect me, if you will bless me, and if you will bring me back safely to this place, then you will be my God and I will serve you and I will give to you a tenth of all that I have.

God kept his side. God was with him when he went to Paten Amrum. God blessed him there.

And as he came back across the Jordan River, he was so great that he had to divide all of his possessions into two companies, too big to travel in just one company. And he recognized the goodness of God. He said, when I pass over this Jordan, all I had was just a stick.

And now God has blessed me so much, I've got to divide things into two companies. But he didn't keep his vow to God. Though he was brought back safely into the land, he dwelt in Shechem and sort of tried to leave God out of his life.

But the ten years that he spent around Shechem had its effect upon his family and they became polluted by the morals of Shechem. And his ten years sojourned there cost him dearly as far as his family was concerned. Ending in his daughter's relationship and his son's treacherous deeds.

And now he has to flee for his life. And where does God take him? Back to Bethel. Back to the place where he first met God.

Where does God take you so often? Back to the place where you first met him. Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do your first works over, Jesus said to the Ephesians. Calling them back to that first love.

That first boom as you became aware of God and you had your first encounters with God and the excitement that you had and how you were writing little love notes to Jesus. And how all you could think about was the Lord and the excitement that filled your heart whenever you thought about him. How you were just, you know, every night of the week gathering together to worship God.

And Jesus is saying, what did I do wrong? Where did I offend you? That you should turn from that love. Go back to Bethel. Dwell there.

And make an altar there to God. Come back to that place. You said that you would come back and that you would worship and that you would make this the house of God.

Make an altar to God who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau, your brother. God is reminding him. And Jacob said to his household, to all that were with him, put away the foreign gods that are among you.

When Jacob had fled from Laban, when his wife Rachel had ripped off her father's little idols, his gods, at the time Jacob did not know it, when Laban pursued after Jacob and caught up with him, Laban accused him of stealing the gods and Jacob said, if you can find them, whoever you find them with, let them be put to death. And Laban searched through the tents trying to find his gods. When he came to the tent of Rachel, she had put them in the camel's saddlebags and she was sitting on them and spread her skirt over them.

And when her father came in and looked through her tent, she said, please don't ask me to stand up. I'm after the manner of women. And so he let her go and did not find the gods.

And so Jacob then was really ticked off with him and told him off and said, you know, you come out accusing me, you haven't found anything. Put it out there in front so everybody can bear witness and all. And they had this real tense situation in this confrontation and finally they put a pile of stones and said, don't you come over this way, you know, I won't go over that way.

And, you know, goodbye. Laban left. But then Rachel probably began to laugh and brought out the gods and said, look at this, I was sitting on them.

And they began to admire her cleverness, her deceitfulness. Her father didn't find them. But Jacob tolerated it.

He didn't say that's terrible. There's only one God and he cannot be fashioned into an image or a form. And by his allowing Rachel to keep them, this idolatry spread in the family so that at this time he has to address the whole family to put away their foreign gods.

No doubt when the sons had sacked the city of Shechem, they probably picked up a lot more of these little gods of the people of Shechem. And idolatry was rampant among Jacob's family. So he orders them, put away your foreign gods.

Clean up. Clean up the house. And then he said, purify yourselves.

Cleansing. And then change your garments. Because we're going to Bethel where I'm going to build an altar unto God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way that I've gone.

He realized God kept his part of the vow. I did not keep mine. I'm going back to Bethel to keep my vow to God.

But we're going to have to clean up before we get there. His lack of strong spiritual leadership in the home, his lack of setting a good spiritual example before his family was very costly. Even as your lack of establishing a strong spiritual example before your family can be costly.

It's very sad the things that we tolerate today. Even worse, the things that we have come to accept. Things that would once be very shocking and abhorrent to us are now very common.

So common that we've just sort of overlooked them now or we're not shocked anymore. We don't get disgusted by evil any longer. It's so prevalent and common.

And too many families are allowing pornographic magazines within the house. Too many families are allowing their children to listen to the porno rot in a lot of the new albums that are popular with the kids. But you haven't taken a strong spiritual stand.

You haven't resisted the complaints of your children. You haven't made a strong spiritual... Jacob stood up and made a strong spiritual stand. He said, all right, that's it.

Get rid of your foreign gods. Cleanse yourselves. The establishing of God's Word within the family once again.

For you are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you, Jesus said. And David said, how can a young man cleanse his way by taking heed to the Word of God? Giving God's Word its place in your family. God help us in the prioritizing of our time.

It is unfortunate that we often give more time to the TV than we do to the Word of God. More time to the daily newspaper than we do the Word of God. It's a poor prioritizing of our time.

Change your garments. They've probably begun to dress in the fashions of the Shechemites. And it had its effect upon them.

Jacob cleaned house. So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands. And all of their earrings, which were probably amulets of sorts, had spiritual connotations.

And Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree, which was by Shechem. He buried them. Rather than carrying them along and saying, well, we'll melt them down and make something else out of them, he buried them.

And they moved on from Shechem toward Bethel. They journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities. Now God is responding to Jacob's stand by, first of all, putting the terror of God upon the hearts of the people.

They were afraid to attack Jacob because the fear of God was in their hearts. They were stronger. They were able to wipe him out, but God put a fear in their hearts, and they did not pursue him.

So Jacob came to Luz, which he renamed Bethel, which is in the land of Canaan. It's only about 15 miles from Shechem. Interesting to me that though he lived in Shechem for 10 years, we have no account of his going back to Bethel.

Going back to that place which was so important to his spiritual life, that place where he had his first encounter with God, you'd think that he'd go back just to sort of sit there and just think, wow, here's where God first revealed himself to me. But he was so into the material things that he wasn't interested in the spiritual until again he had to flee for his life. And now returns to Bethel, just 15 miles away.

And there he built an altar, and he called the place God of the house of God, El Bethel, because there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother. Now Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, died. When his father Isaac married Rebecca, her father gave to Rebecca Deborah as her nurse.

And she came back with Rebecca and lived with Isaac and Rebecca, and no doubt was the governess for the children, so that Jacob had known Deborah all of his life. And she probably had a very important part in his early life as the servant girls, the nurses, oftentimes would have the full care and the training of the child as they were growing up. Now, when Rebecca died, Jacob probably insisted, and during the time, the 10 years he was in Shechem, he probably went down to Hebron to visit his aged father Isaac, and he probably insisted that Deborah come back and live with him.

But she now is quite old, and this traumatic experience that they've just gone through probably was too much for her, so that when they came to Bethel, it was just too much, and there Deborah, this person who played a very important part in Jacob's life, died. And she was buried below Bethel under a terebinth tree so that the name of it was called Alon Bakuth, or the Weeping Terebinth Tree, because of their weeping at the death of Deborah. Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan Amram, and he blessed him.

And so there at Bethel, God appeared to him again. He brought him back to the place where God first appeared, where first God made Himself real to his heart, and now God again waits. You know, it's an interesting thing, how God so often waits for us.

He's always there. He's always waiting. We stray often so far from Him in our own hearts.

You're never really that far from God. When I was a little kid, I used to sing a song in church. I was about five years old.

You may be a million miles from the gates of peace, but you're one little step from God. It's so easy to drift from the path, but you find it hard to get back. And though you're a million miles from the gates of peace, you're only one little step from God.

And how true that God is waiting. Here Jacob had been journeying 30 years, traveling here and there, messing things up here and there. Now he's desperate once again.

He has to flee for his life. He comes back to Bethel. What does he find? God's been waiting at Bethel the whole while for him.

What do you find when you turn back to God again? He's been waiting the whole time for you. Oh, the patience of God with us. How wonderful it is as God just waits for us to come back to Him.

God appeared to Jacob again, and God said to him, Your name is Jacob. Still he is Jacob. Still God is just the last resort.

When everything else fails, try God. You're still Jacob. Your name is Jacob.

He'll catch your supplanter. Your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name. So he called his name Israel.

This is it. You've gone far enough after your own self now from now on. You're to be the prince of God.

You're to be governed by God. We'll return with more of our verse-by-verse study through the book of Genesis in our next lesson as we continue to follow the life of Jacob as he arrives in Bethel. And we do hope you'll make plans to join us.

But right now, I'd like to remind you that if you missed any part of today's message or perhaps you'd like to order a copy for that special friend or loved one, you can do so by simply contacting one of our customer service representatives, and they'd be more than happy to assist you with the ordering details. Simply call 1-800-272-WORD and phone orders can be taken Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Pacific Time. Once again, our toll-free number is 1-800-272-9673.

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And now, on behalf of The Word for Today, we'd like to thank all of you who share in supporting this ministry with your prayers and financial support. And be sure to join us again next time as Pastor Chuck Smith continues his verse-by-verse study through the book of Genesis. That's right here on the next edition of The Word for Today.

Now, once again, here's Pastor Chuck Smith. May God now take the Word and hide it in our hearts as we again studied and meditated upon His truth. And may it come back in our time of need to guide and to direct us in our walk and in our relationship with God.

And some of you who may have strayed far from God and far from your commitment to God, may you hear the voice of God calling you back to Bethel, that place of your first encounter, that place of first love, the first bloom of love in that relationship with God. And may you experience again the presence and the power of God working in your life. In Jesus' name.

The Bible calls Christians to be ready to give an answer. And for this reason, I encourage you to listen to Pastor Chuck Smith's Prophecy Update. Find out the Biblical perspective concerning the Middle East, Israel, and Scriptures that relate to current world events.

Learn how you can give an intelligent and Scriptural response to someone who might be concerned about the future. But what can we know for certain? Surely the Lord is in this place wherever I go. And He will keep me.

He will strengthen me. He's given His promises to me. And I'm going to make it through.

That I know. Because the Lord is with me wherever I go. For more information on how you can order Pastor Chuck Smith's Prophecy Update on DVD that includes a bonus CD, call The Word for Today at 1-800-272-9673 or visit us online at thewordfortoday.org This program has been sponsored by The Word for Today in Costa Mesa, California.

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