

Back To Bethel

Introduction. Jacob is one of the strangest characters in the Bible. Someone has said that he is the worst and the best man in the Old Testament. When we see him cheating his brother, Esau, out of his birthright, he is at his worst; when we hear him making his vows to God after his vision of the ladder and the angels, he is at his best. When he puts on an animal skin and deceives his father, Isaac, he is at his worst; when he wrestles with the angel and pleads for a blessing, he is at his best.

After his sin against Esau, Jacob's mother advised him to flee. He left his home in a hurry and spent his first night under the stars with a stone for a pillow. It was there that God appeared to him in a vivid way. The next morning he made his vow with God (Genesis 28:18-22).

Jacob went on his way, became rich and forgot God and the vows he made at Bethel. The years went by and now he is coming home. He has another experience with God: he wrestles with the angel and prevails. He meets Esau and Esau forgives him. However, Jacob does not have peace; his sin is still on his heart. It is then that God calls him back to Bethel (Genesis 35:1-3). Jacob was glad to go. He had cheated others and had been cheated. Life held no peace of heart for him because he had sinned greatly. He heard God's call and went back to Bethel and rededicated his life in that holy place.

Sometimes we get far away from God without fully realizing it. Back in the years gone by we remember our Bethel. We remember when we obeyed the gospel, but the years have come and gone and they have taken away some of our spiritual devotion. No matter how far you have gone away from Him, God still loves you and still calls you. What does going "back to Bethel" mean to us today?

I. ***Back To Bethel Means Back To The Bible***

A. Several characteristics of the Bible need to be mentioned.

1. The Bible is inspired by God (1 Corinthians 2:9-13; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21).
2. The Bible was written for a purpose (John 20:31; Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; 1 John 5:13).
3. The Bible is our true source of light and is our guide (Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 6:23).
4. The Bible is a delight of the righteous (Job 23:12; Psalm 1:2).
5. The Bible is to be studied (Isaiah 34:16; 1 Peter 2:2-3).
6. The Bible is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16-17; Ephesians 6:17).

B. Henry Van Dyke said, "A man who has been through one hundred high schools and universities and who does not know the Bible is not an

educated man and never can be.” We are blessed if we follow God’s word (Proverbs 29:18; Luke 11:28).

II. ***Back To Bethel Means Back To Faithful Attendance***

- A. Why is it that we need to attend?
 1. To worship God (John 4:24).
 2. To grow in knowledge (2 Peter 3:17-18).
 3. To work and bear fruit (Romans 12:10-13).
 4. To associate with the humble (Romans 12:16).
 5. To be renewed inwardly (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).
 6. To be corrected (Matthew 18:15; Titus 1:9).
- B. Do you really think you need to miss the assembly if you could be here? Will you miss if family comes in or if friends come over? To do such shows a deficiency in devotion to the Lord.

III. ***Back To Bethel Means Back To Fervent Prayer***

- A. Jesus knew that we would become slack in our prayers (Luke 18:1). However, the Lord has told us to be bold in our prayers (Hebrews 4:16).
 1. This was exemplified by Abraham (Genesis 18:23-32).
 2. This was exemplified by Moses (Exodus 33:12, 18).
- B. There are several characteristics to fervent prayer.
 1. Prayer must be offered in faith (Matthew 21:22; James 1:5-8).
 2. Prayer must be offered with humility (Luke 18:9-14; Psalm 34:18; James 4:6).
 3. Prayer must be offered in harmony with God’s will (1 John 5:14; Luke 22:42).
 4. Prayer must be offered by those righteous before God (1 Peter 3:12; Proverbs 28:9).
 5. Prayer must be offered in a spirit of thanksgiving (Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 4:6).

IV. ***Back To A Love Of All***

- A. There are many responsibilities relating to love demanded upon us.
 1. We must love God (Matthew 22:37).
 2. We must love our neighbors (Matthew 22:39).
 3. We must love our spouse and our children (Ephesians 5:25, 28-29).
 4. We must love the lost (Luke 15:1-32).
- B. The Lord knew that loving as we should would be difficult. Have we risen to the challenge and fulfilled the Lord’s command?

V. ***Back To Purity Of Life***

- A. We are purified by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:13-14); therefore, we are commanded to be pure (Romans 13:11-14; 1 Thessalonians

4:1-8; James 4:8).

1. We do not abstain in the sense that we just "cut back" on fornication.
 2. We do not abstain by being in a loving and committed relationship.
 3. We do not abstain by practicing safe sex.
 4. Abstain means we do not practice immorality at all! We are to be exemplary in purity (1 Timothy 4:12; 5:22; Proverbs 5:15-20).
- B. We live in a society that is saturated with immodesty and immorality. If we meditate upon what is pure, we will be blessed (Philippians 4:8). David made a choice to look upon Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:2). Keep your eyes right with God (Job 31:1; Matthew 5:27-30)!

Conclusion. Jacob's first love was for God, but he had forgotten Him in the mad rush. In Revelation 2:4, Jesus rebuked the Ephesian church for leaving their first love. That is true of many of us. Once we found our highest joy in serving the Lord, but we have drifted with the tide (Hebrews 2:1-3). We need to find that anchor of the soul (Hebrews 6:18-20). Other loves have entered and God has been left outside of our hearts in the cold (Isaiah 49:15-16).

Back to your first love means back to the right life and the right spirit. It means back to a life where God is put above all else in all things. When Jacob went back to Bethel, he lived a life of faithful service. Bethel calls you back today to a happy and active service (Deuteronomy 28:47-48; Malachi 1:10-13; Mark 9:41; Luke 22:26-27).

Are you far away from Christ today? God is calling you to come closer, to come to Bethel, to come and learn anew of the beauty and love and greatness of Jesus (Matthew 11:28). Then we can go out to serve Him until He calls us home. Sometimes it takes a great sorrow or suffering to bring us back to Bethel. It is terrible that it takes that, but when we go back to Bethel, we are made happy. Happiness came to Jacob and it will come to us too.