

The Forgotten Vow Of Jacob

Introduction. In Genesis 35:1-7, God told Jacob to return to Bethel to build an altar. Nearly thirty years earlier, Jacob had made a vow, but he seems to have forgotten about it, and God is now calling him to fulfill it. A vow is defined as a "solemn promise or pledge." It is especially used in the sense of deity.

Jacob was glad to go. He had sinned deeply and felt the need of God's mercy. He had cheated others and had been cheated. Life held no peace for him. 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, but then we remember our Bethel. We remember when we obeyed the gospel, but the years have come and gone and our spiritual vitality has suffered. We have neglected our duty and we have backslidden.

No matter how far you have gone away from Him, God still loves you and still calls you. You are probably too busy with the world that you cannot hear Him, but He is still calling and you should answer. There are several lessons that can be gleaned from this forgotten vow of Jacob which can easily be applied to our godly service.

I. ***The Historical Background***

A. Thirty years before, Jacob had made a vow.

1. It was made as he was fleeing the wrath of Esau. Jacob had stolen Esau's blessing from their father Isaac (Genesis 27:41-45).
2. Leaving Beersheba, he headed toward Haran. Haran was a city northwest of the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia or the land of Paddan-aram. This was the land Abraham journeyed through to reach the land of Canaan (Genesis 11:31).
3. On the way, he stopped at what is now called Bethel (Genesis 28:10-15).
 - a) There he had a dream, in which he saw what we commonly call "Jacob's Ladder."
 - b) In this dream he saw angels ascending and descending on a ladder. God promised to be with him and safely return him to his home.
4. The dream prompted Jacob to make his vow (Genesis 28:16-22).
 - a) He vowed to make the Lord his God if God carries out His promise.
 - b) He vowed to sanctify the stone upon which his head had rested and which he has set up as a pillar.
 - c) He vowed to give God a tenth of all that God would give him.

- B. For the next twenty years, Jacob dwelt in Haran.
 - 1. As God promised, He was with Jacob.
 - 2. Jacob prospered both in family, and in gaining wealth (Genesis 29-30).
 - 3. Upon Jacob's return, God kept him safe from Laban, who was pursuing him (Genesis 31) and from Esau, who was coming to meet him (Genesis 32-33).
- C. By the time of Genesis 35, Jacob had been living in Canaan ten years.
 - 1. He had settled near the city of Shechem (Genesis 33:18).
 - 2. However, he had not bothered to go back to Bethel, where the Lord had appeared to him and where he had made his vow. So it appears that Jacob had forgotten his vow, and for this reason God commands him to return (Genesis 35:1).

II. ***The Application***

- A. God expects us to keep our vows.
 - 1. He does not take vows lightly, and neither should we (Ecclesiastes 5:2-5).
 - 2. We need to be sure to keep any covenant or vow that we make with God.
 - a) How about the "vow" we made when we became Christians (Romans 6:4)?
 - b) We vowed or promised God that we would turn from our sins and follow Christ with all our heart (Revelation 2:10). Are we faithfully keeping this vow?
- B. We are prone to forget our vows when God has fulfilled His side of them.
 - 1. We saw where God fulfilled His side, but Jacob had not.
 - a) We are very apt to make vows to God when we feel danger or death is imminent (cf. Jeremiah 20:7-9).
 - b) We are also very apt to make vows to God when we are trying to solve very difficult problems such as marital problems, family problems, or financial problems.
 - 2. We may "forget" them, but these vows are just as binding as those made upon careful reflection!
- C. We are prone to forget our vows when all is well.
 - 1. In the case of Jacob, he had a nice family, had become extremely wealthy and had settled down in his home country.
 - 2. The same is often true of many Christians.
 - a) Many obey the gospel at times in their lives when they are troubled.
 - b) But later, especially if they enjoy financial security, they forget their commitment to God and Christ.

3. But consider God's warning to Israel against forgetfulness after they entered the land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 8:11-20).
- D. We are prone to forget our vows when we allow ourselves to be influenced by the world.
1. Jacob's family had accepted the foreign gods of the people around them (Genesis 35:2).
 - a) Solomon allowed himself to be turned away from God (Nehemiah 13:26).
 - b) Demas forsook his vow because he loved this "present world" (2 Timothy 4:10).
 2. Forsaking vows can affect young and old alike.
 - a) Many young Christians are zealous at first, but they are influenced by their peers, television, the Internet, humanistic teaching in the schools, etc., and they lose interest in spiritual matters.
 - b) Many adult Christians, who are influenced by the materialism and immorality of our society, often lose interest in spiritual matters over time.
- E. If we have forgotten our vows, we need to go back to the beginning.
1. Jesus told the church at Ephesus to go back to the beginning (Revelation 2:4-5).
 - a) They had left their "first love."
 - b) They were told to "remember therefore from where you have fallen."
 - c) They were told to "repent and do the first works."
 2. Many children of God need to return to the fundamentals of Bible study and meditation, daily prayer, worship, fellowship with His saints, etc.

Conclusion. When we fulfill our forgotten vows, there are renewed blessings. When Jacob fulfilled his vow, God appeared to him and renewed the promises that had been made to Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 35:9-15). So it can be with us! It may be that we have forgotten the original commitment we made when we first obeyed Christ. But if we will just return to Him in full repentance and prayer and fulfill our vow of devotion to Him, all of His spiritual blessings can be ours again (Psalm 116:14; Nehemiah 10:29).