

Russell Kelfer

Jacob: Return to Bethel

711-A

Series: God's Living Legends (Part 1)

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10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org

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We have been seeing life as it really is. We have been walking in the footsteps of some of God's living legends, men and women like Adam, Cain, Noah, Lot, Abraham, Sarah, Ishmael, Isaac and Rebekah, to name a few. What we have seen is real people with real struggles who knew a real God. As we journeyed with Isaac, for instance, we viewed a dysfunctional family, filled with favoritism, disrespect, and rebellion. He had a conniving wife and two devious, ill-mannered sons, one of whom was destined to bear the mantle of spiritual leadership for a generation. It was hard to imagine that out of this family could come God's man of the hour.

Our last lesson, however, followed Isaac's boys after they left home, and we saw an amazing scenario. One boy was a fugitive from his own brother's threats, the other entering a third marriage out of the will of God. Yet we watched God weave the family threads back together, bringing harmony and love out of grief and discord. We watched a blind and aged father live to see it all. But he saw more than that. He saw his deceitful, lying, devious son meet up with God at Bethel and be converted. He saw him travel to Haran to find a wife and get more than he bargained for, as a sovereign God created circumstances to change his character. Then we watched as Jacob went to Peniel, his place of total surrender, and were amazed as he journeyed home only to be united once more with his brother and settle down to be God's man.

It was a moment of rejoicing as we took a deep breath and stopped to praise an omniscient God who knew all along that He had both the plan and the man. Both would be used for His glory. So the transformation of Jacob brought us hope and encouragement. If God could do that for Jacob, then God can use even us. God can use even our children. God can use even our family. All we need to do is let Him.

As we left off in the last lesson, Genesis 33 was drawing to

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a close. Jacob and his family had settled in Shechem and built an altar to the living God. We are not going to deal with chapter 34 in any detail for the details are difficult to deal with. We do know that Jacob's boys were to become problems in their own right. They would deal to him at least some of the grief that he had caused his own father. We also know the pressures that come into the home from its relationships with the outside world are complicated indeed. One detail is important as we skip over chapter 34. This detail is that it ends with Jacob and his boys in great disfavor with the neighboring families around him. As he put it in the next to the last verse, "they were odious among them". That was his phrase and he ends with the thought that the neighbors were going to gang up on them and kill them all.

With that cheerful thought, chapter 34 draws to a close and chapter 35 begins with these words: "*Then God said to Jacob.*" Troubled times, fearful times, these are the times that cause men to listen for the voice of God. We hear His voice in the peaceful, balmy summers of life, yet we often become mesmerized by the sheer prosperity of it all. But, oh, in the stormy, winters of life, when life and limb are threatened, then how sweet the voice of God sounds to trembling hearts. When we are in trouble, we listen to God. (That is one reason He lets us get into trouble so often.) It is worth it to Him to help unravel the twisted cords of our lives in order to get us to listen. Once again, God had Jacob's attention. Once He had it, He had a specific goal in mind. Let's look at Genesis 35:

Then God said to Jacob, "Arise go up to Bethel, and live there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." (Genesis 35:1 NAS)

This is what God had on His mind. He had taken Jacob from defeat to Bethel, from Bethel to the trials of Haran, from Haran to the release at Peniel, and now God is saying to Jacob, "Return to Bethel." Why? Why would God do that? And must we occasionally return to Bethel as well? That is the subject of this lesson.

As the curtain goes up on this chapter on the life of our living legend, Jacob, fearful of total annihilation at the hands of his enemy, hears his blessed God give him his new marching orders. He is to arise and go back to Bethel where his spiritual life began, build an altar, worship, and settle down. After Peniel, it is important that we return to the basics. We must go back to the

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beginning where the blood covered our sins; back to the freshness of new life, new hope, new joy; back to Bethel. It is a trip some of us need to make today. Some of us who are weary, battle-scarred saints may, in the midst of the spiritual Hiroshimas of life, become either shell-shocked or battle-fatigued. We need to go back to Bethel where it all began. Many of us need to pack up with Jacob this morning and travel there.

Jacob's journey, like ours, required some preparation. This is so because part of the problem with our spiritual pilgrimage is our failure to become disentangled with what the Scripture calls "the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things which enter in and choke the Word so that it becomes unfruitful." So the preparation is separation. Now Jacob put it this way in verse 2:

So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments;

and let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and has been with me wherever I have gone."

(Genesis 35:2,3 NAS)

Before we can return to Bethel, Jacob said we have some things to put away. We have to purify. We have to put on. We have to take off the garments that are so defiled by this world, so that we can be bathed in the holiness of a righteous God. We need to put on the fresh garments of a walk with God or else our return to Bethel will serve no purpose at all.

Very simply put, it is inventory time at Jacob's house. He and all of his family and all of his employees were told to take stock of all of their idols, the foreign gods to which they had become perhaps unconsciously attached. They had to lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily beset them so that they could run with patience the race back to Bethel. Such an inventory might not hurt us either. Jacob found that the preparation was separation, separation from defilement by the gods of this world. Jesus said it best as He petitioned His Father on our behalf:

I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*.

They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

Sanctify [set them apart] them in the truth; Thy word is truth."

(John 17:15-17 NAS)

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It is part of the mystery of godliness. The believer is sent into the world to change the world; but before he can change the world, he must be separated from the world unto God or the world will not recognize the marks of ownership of a holy God. If it is disguised in a costume of the world's own making, the world cannot recognize it. Separation. It is a dirty word in today's spiritual vocabulary. There was a time in history when that was not so. Yet to reach the world, you must be separated *from* it in order to be identifiable *by* it as God's. I believe God has called us to be separated and undefiled in at least five areas of our Christian life. Let's look at those five things: the call to be separated from wrong relationships, from wrong spiritual experiences, from wrong counsel, from wrong habits, and from wrong doctrine.

1- We are to be separated from wrong relationships. The Bible is a book about a holy God and His relationship with a people whom He has created to be like Him, but who have forsaken Him and gone their own way. So this holy God paid the supreme price to purchase them back for Himself; all of them, all of us. Some choose to let Him. To those who do, John 1:12 tells us that He gives to them the authority of sons, all the rights and privileges of being His child. He places them into what He chooses to call "His body". Some are hands, some are feet, some are eyes, some are ears. Each has a unique function. Each plays a unique role. All receive their instructions from the head who is Jesus Christ Himself. Everything He tells them to do is for the mutual benefit of the whole body. So all working together, He thus produces a body that magnifies His character.

Now from the beginning, redeemed man has had a problem. He has chosen to build his friendships in many cases and develop deep relationships with those who are not a part of the same body, those who have no connection to the same head. Hands that do not reach out in the Master's name. Feet that do not run at the Master's call. Eyes with no vision of the Master's purposes. Ears that are deaf to the Master's voice. When these parts are brought together for any reason, united as husband and wife, deep friendships, dating relationships, or partnerships, spiritual schizophrenia occurs. One hand reaches out and the other one pulls it back. One foot wants to run to God; the other will not bow its knee. The result is confusion and an ineffectual life.

That is why believers are to build close relationships with

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other believers to receive the warmth and encouragement from each other. Then, built up in the faith, they are to reach out to the world to befriend the world in order to win the world, but never to find their common pleasures in the world or with the world. That is why our children must build their friendships with other Christians. For “how can two walk together unless they be agreed?” As a part of the body, we can reach out to the world, but to cut off our hand and try to glue it onto a part of the world won’t work. Different blood flows through their veins. It will cease to function. Parents, please don’t let your children date unbelievers. Don’t let their closest friendships come from the world. *Know ye not friendship with the world is enmity with God?* We are reminded of that in these verses:

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship have light with darkness?

Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

Or what agreement has a temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God has said, “I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

THEREFORE, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,” SAYS THE LORD. “AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; AND I WILL WELCOME YOU.

“AND I WILL BE A FATHER TO YOU, AND YOU SHALL BE SONS AND DAUGHTERS TO ME,” Says the Lord Almighty.

(II Corinthians 6:14-18 NAS)

We have to put away the idol of wrong relationships. If you are married to an unbeliever, you do not leave them. God will grant you grace and use it to change you. Marriage is meant to be a permanent relationship. That is why, if you are not married, you do not even put yourself in the position to make that compromise. That is why Paul said that Christian widows may be free to remarry but only to other Christians.

If you are a young Christian and you are still running with the old crowd, still using them as a base for your friendships, for your activities, for your mutual encouragement, be careful. They will draw you from your first love. They don’t understand. Love them to win them, but get your power from within the body of Christ. Jacob’s people had to put away the idol of friendship

with the world.

2- They and we are called to put away all forms of adultery with the spirit world. There are only two sources of spiritual power. One comes from Satan and one comes from God. Whatever is not of God is from Satan. There are no neutral spirits. That is why all forms of astrology, witchcraft, mind control, or extra-sensory mental behavior that deals with the spirit world, but not with the Holy Spirit, is to be avoided at any cost. Ouija boards, horoscopes, fortune telling, all derive their power directly from Satan. That is why Jacob told his people to discard their earrings. There was nothing wrong with earrings, but these were amulets used to ward off evil spirits. There was something wrong with earrings that were used as tools in the spirit world. God warned His people:

Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart the peoples to be Mine.

Now a man or a woman who is a medium or a spiritist shall surely be put to death. (Leviticus 20:26,27a NAS)

In II Kings 23 King Josiah was told to reinstate the Passover in Israel to make themselves holy to God. In verse 24 we are told that Josiah then removed the mediums and the spiritists and the teraphim and the idols that he might confirm the words of the law.

What if those practices have been a part of your life in years past as a believer or as an unbeliever? There is an incident you may recall in Acts 19 that may be of some help. Paul had been used mightily of God. But there were Jewish magicians and sorcerers and exorcists attempting to use the name of Jesus without the authority of Jesus. An incident occurs that confounded them all. Then we read:

Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices.

And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of all; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing. (Acts 19:18-20 NAS)

Do you have astrology books or symbols in your house? Ouija boards? Trinkets or gadgets that can be used in witchcraft

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or magic? Let me make a suggestion to you. Go home today and put them in the trash basket. They are an abomination to the Lord. Separate yourself from all spiritual experience that does not come from God's Spirit.

3- We need to be separate from wrong counsel. Psalm 1:1 is a further extension of the same truth:

Blessed is the man who does not take his counsel from the wicked, does not find his frame of reference from unbelievers or have his fellowship with those who scoff at God.

(Paraphrase)

We have studied in times past in great detail, God's perspective of seeking spiritual counsel from the world, so we will not spend much time here, but I will remind you of Proverbs 19:27 in the Living Bible which says:

Stop listening to teaching that contradicts what you know is right.

How can you get spiritual counsel from one who does not have the Spirit? Jacob's flock had to separate themselves from ungodly counsel and so do we. If you are in a troubled marriage and you want God's perspective, don't ask your unbelieving neighbors what to do. Go to God's men and God's women for God's mind.

4- We must separate ourselves from wrong habits and wrong places. In Ephesians 4:22 Paul reminds us to put off the former behavior which represented the old you and put on the new man which is fashioned after the mind of Christ. Then he names a few things. Lying? Get rid of it, just don't do it anymore. Anger? Don't let the sun go down on your wrath. Stealing? Don't do it anymore. Laziness? He says to go to work. Bad language? Finished. Slander? Never. He says to separate yourself from this kind of behavior or you will never be able to wear the garments of holiness.

I am convinced that legalism in generations past which tended to judge spirituality by external habits has become a boomerang in our day. We have so recoiled against the "thou shalt nots" that we have forgotten why they were there in the first place. And there are some "thou shalt nots" which are Scriptural absolutes. These are not to be discarded with the ones you may have determined were tradition or overkill. The things we just mentioned: lying, stealing, slothfulness, bad language, slander,

or gossip are all Scriptural no nos.

Stealing and lying aren't acceptable just because they're in business. Slander and slothfulness aren't acceptable just because everyone else does it. And those "little" sins that everyone else accepts are like drops of poison in the heart of the believer; little compromises that steal the holiness of God and rob the Christian of that special kind of power that only belongs to those whose hearts are wholly His.

In I Peter 4:1 Peter strikes the same chord but in a more practical way. He says that you are a new person now so separate yourself from persons and places that represent these things. He lists sexual permissiveness, drunkenness, wild parties, drinking bouts, and all forms of idolatry.

In this passage there are five things we are told to stay away from and three of them involve alcohol. The reason is that nothing Satan has ever concocted so counterfeits the Holy Spirit of God as alcohol. Try this sometime. Make yourself a list of the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Draw a line down the page. Then opposite that fruit of the spirit, write down Satan's counterfeit which he produces using alcohol or drugs. God produces love. Satan produces lust. God produces joy. Satan produces happiness. God produces peace. Satan produces tranquility. God produces patience. Satan produces tolerance. God's Spirit releases the divine nature in man. Satan's spirit, using alcohol or drugs, releases the sin nature in man. This produces a cheap imitation of the real thing. This is why Paul says to *not be drunk with wine wherein there is debauchery, but rather be filled with the Holy Spirit*. He pits the one against the other. One is a counterfeit of the other.

Another project would be to make a list on a piece of paper of all the positive benefits ever accrued to mankind through the use of alcohol or drugs. List all of the potential benefits it offers your children. List also all the positive ways it can affect your testimony and your life. On another piece of paper, list the negative affects it has accrued to mankind. Try to list the murders, the rapes, the highway deaths, the broken homes, the broken bodies, the wrecked lives. List all the damages it could hold for your children if they fall into its addictive grasp. List all the ways your having it or using it could cause a weaker brother

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to stumble. In God's name, if your list looks like mine did, go home, pour the stuff down the drain. Maybe at least it will clean out the pipes. It just isn't worth it.

You may say, "I don't think God says that I can't have just a little of it." I'm not going to argue with you at all. That was too easy, wasn't it? God didn't say you can't put rat poison in with your children's lunches either. After all, they might not eat too much of it and they might survive. God didn't tell you not to stand on your head in the middle of the street either, but it is hazardous to your health. But it is not as hazardous as alcohol and drugs.

God gives us simple principles of sobriety and separation from that which defiles, and He expects us to have enough sense to avoid the consequences. In this case, the consequences are deadly. Please, don't stand and lecture your child on the evils of marijuana while you sip your cocktail in front of them. They don't understand that and neither do I. As Dr. Geisler put it: "Marijuana is simply the narcotic of their generation. Alcohol is ours." Probably countless more have tasted death from alcohol this year than will ever die from marijuana. They are both wrong and for the same reasons.

And we are to separate ourselves from that which defiles the mind as well. Adultery of the body begins with adultery of the mind, and the compromises we make when we watch today's entertainment not only defiles our minds, but destroys our testimonies. And little by little, we have gently lowered our standards until what was once abominable is seen to many believers as either comical or acceptable. God help us.

Finally, we must separate ourselves from wrong doctrine: doctrines of division, doctrines of apostasy, doctrines of heresy. We are not to listen to it, take heed to it, or continue to expose ourselves to it. We are not going to look at that in this lesson, but you can read I Timothy 1:4-11; II Peter 1:14; I Timothy 6:3-5. We are not to fill our minds with lies in the name of truth. In other words, if you listen to the cults of this world, don't wonder that you are confused. Listen only to truth.

These then are five of the foreign gods that we must put away if we are to return to Bethel, the house of worship in the land of beginnings. Our response must be as Jacob's household.

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So they gave to Jacob all of the foreign Gods which they had, all the rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem.

(Genesis 35:4 NAS)

Now I don't know about you, but I get a lot of confidence about Jacob's spiritual leadership in this verse. Can you imagine going into your children's rooms, those of you who have teenagers, and saying, "We are going on a trip and want you to get rid of all of your music." You can just hear them now, "Yes, Dad. Yes Mom, I'll just throw them out the window." Or you could say, "We are going to get rid of the television set today. There are some things on it that we don't like." Then you pull the plug and dodge. Jacob had become a spiritual leader. So the preparation was separation. Now look at the power as a result of that separation as they return to Bethel.

As they journeyed, there was great terror upon the cities which were around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

(Genesis 35:5 NAS)

Don't overlook that verse. Do you remember five verses back, Jacob was scared to death that his neighbors were going to close in on him and kill him because of what his sons had just done. Now having separated themselves from all that defiled them, they passed through the enemy camp untouched. You may ask why. These were believers that had separated themselves. There was stark fear this time in the eyes of the enemy. If you don't learn anything else from this lesson, learn this one fact, the enemy can be scared to death. When you and I get really right with God and head back to Bethel, we become the untouchables, not fugitives in the midst of the enemy camp. Some of us have yet to fully grasp, let alone fully experience the power unleashed in a holy life.

Now we unwrap the package and see the purpose of returning to Bethel continuing with verse 6:

So Jacob came to Luz, (that is, Bethel), that is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people that were with him.

And he built an altar there, and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed Himself to him, when he fled from his brother.

Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak; it was named Allon-bacuth.

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Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him.

And God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; You shall no longer be called Jacob, But Israel shall be your name.” Thus He called him Israel.

God also said to him, I am God Almighty; Be fruitful and multiply; A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, And kings shall come forth from you.

“And the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, And I will give the land to your descendants after you.”

Then God went up from him in the place where He had spoken with him.

And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He had spoken with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured out a libation on it; he also poured oil on it.

So Jacob named the place where God had spoken with him Bethel. (Genesis 35:6-15 NAS)

So there you have Jacob’s return to Bethel. We can visualize God’s objectives. First of all, Jacob revered God. He worshipped. He built an altar as a symbol of his submission and surrender and he worshipped God. Worship. This is the missing ingredient in many a Christian life. We know how to ask God for things. We know even how to thank God for things. But I believe that most of us don’t really know how to worship. (And I don’t mean corporate worship; that’s only a small part of it.)

Real worship involves setting aside time, real quality time to look into the face of God simply to behold who He is. It is coming to increasingly behold His attributes and character as we bow down before Him in adoration. We view ourselves in the right perspective, not as people who send instructions to a partner in heaven, but as unworthy subjects of the King of Kings whose only goal is to please His heart. Never ever would it enter our minds to question His wisdom or His timing in our lives. Only when we come to view God like that do we have His perspective. But because we are born in sin and exalt ourselves to the throne of our lives to worship another this is contrary and foreign to us. We have to *learn* how to worship. It takes practice, hours of practice, days of practice. But the man or the woman who learns to worship learns to live in God’s frame of reference and thus cannot help but view life from God’s perspective. One of the

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reasons God brought Jacob back to Bethel was to worship. He said in verse 11, *I am God Almighty*. Don't forget that, Jacob, and you are on your way to a holy life.

The second reason God brought Jacob back to Bethel was to remember. A couple visits the honeymoon cottage or the place where they met and their lives are flooded with memories. First love bursts forth again as they remember. In verse 1 God told Jacob to go to Bethel. In verse 7, Jacob built an altar where God had revealed Himself to him when he fled from his brother. So God reminds him of the circumstances of his conversion. Has God ever done that for you? Has he flooded your mind with the awful state of your life before you met Christ? Jacob had to remember how rotten he was. He had wronged his mother, he had wronged his father, he had wronged his brother. The consequences of his sin were exposed. He was running for his life. His whole family was splintered because of him. Then God reminded him of the promises He had made in the past and that He still planned to do everything He promised. He will be the father of nations. He will be the father of kings. He will possess the land and his descendants will as well.

One reason we miss the power in our time alone with God is that we are always looking for something new. Sometimes God just wants to repeat the same promises to us again and again and again until we really believe Him. When He does that, we can't write them off as coincidence when they come to pass. We aren't as likely to lose heart as we wait for His perfect timing. That is why we need to re-read old commitments from our books of remembrance. That is why we need to re-hear or re-read messages or tapes that God used at a certain time in our lives. We need to keep those books or those tapes handy and go over them again and again. Why? Because we are creatures in need of repetition. God's promises to the patriarchs were the same promises over and over and over again. They needed to hear it one more time. So do we.

The third purpose of Bethel was renewal. Having remembered God and having remembered His promises, Jacob set up a pillar, poured oil on it and drove a stake in the ground reconfirming the name of the place, "Bethel", where God had spoken to him. That is what God was after. Jacob is what God was after. That is why He took him back to Bethel.

But life goes on. An important thing to remember when you

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go to Bethel is that you don't build a tabernacle and stay. The experience is not an end within itself. The pressures go on. You are just better equipped for the pressures. The warfare may actually intensify, but you are better armed to be more than conquerors. In verse 8, upon his arrival at Bethel, death strikes and Deborah dies. Jacob must stop his worship long enough to deal with the realities of life. Now just the other side of the mountain top, tragedy again comes into Jacob's life. It often does the other side of Bethel.

Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and she suffered severe labor.

And it came about when she was in severe labor that the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for now you have another son."

And it came about as her soul was departing (for she died), that she named him Ben-oni (which means son of my sorrow); but his father called him Benjamin (which means son of my right hand.)

So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).

And Jacob set up a pillar over her grave; that is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day.

Then Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.

And it came about while Israel was dwelling in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard of it. (Genesis 35:16-22 NAS)

That is how the chapter ends. So Israel, or Jacob as we know him, finds indeed that life and death go on. His beloved Rachel gives birth again, this time to Benjamin, and then she dies. Our legend, God's man of the hour just the other side of Bethel, must stop to mourn his loved one and then resume the responsibility of a motherless child. As if that were not enough, another son disgraces the whole family and Israel hears of it and is crushed. The Bethels of life are not designed to isolate us from the realities of life, but they are to insulate us to handle the realities of life. Sometimes the fire gets even hotter the other side of Bethel.

So Jacob returned to Bethel at God's command. His preparation was separation. Through it he gained unbelievable power over the enemy. Then he learned to revere, to remember

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and to renew his relationship with God. Life went on, including deep tragedy. But life had a new perspective.

This lesson now comes down to us. How can Jacob's experience at Bethel affect us? I think the first area of application is obvious. There may be some areas in our lives in which the foreign gods of this world have gained access to our lives and diluted our power. God says to put them away. We are to regularly purify ourselves and put on the garments of holiness. The first day of the month, the first of the year, the beginning of a new week, these are all good opportunities to take inventory and begin again. Wrong relationships, wrong spiritual experiences, wrong counsel, wrong habits, and wrong doctrine must be put away. There is power in letting them go, power the enemy can't invade. You can pass through his camp untouched, because the undefiled, the separated ones, possess a holy authority in the presence of evil.

But beyond that, I believe God is calling some of us back to Bethel to re-experience that *first love* of our new-found faith in Christ. When was the last time you got alone with God and just re-visited Calvary? When last did you experience the agony, experience the grief, experience the pain that it cost God to buy your salvation? When did you last look at what your life was like before you met Jesus? When did you project last what your life would be like today if you had never met the Master? Have you ever done that? When last did you tell your children of the emptiness, the loneliness, the fruitlessness of a life without God? Have not some of us grown so callous, so presumptuous, so ungrateful, so busy *being* Christians that we have forgotten the only reason we *are* is that God loved us so much that He died for us.

I believe I need to go back to Bethel and so do some of you. Three things await us there. *The first is a fresh view of God.* A look at His omnipotence will remind us that there is nothing He cannot do. A look at His omniscience will remind us that there is nothing He does not know. A look at His omnipresence will remind us that there is no place at any time He will not be. A look at His love will remind us that there are no limits to what He will give to us. A look at His sovereignty will remind us that this world and all who are in it can never get out of His control because He is God. Oh, for that fresh wind of the Spirit that comes from worshipping Him and Him alone. When was the last

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time you set aside an hour just for worship and nothing else? We need to return to Bethel to reverence God.

Next, we need to return to Bethel for a fresh reminder of what He has done. Do you ever forget what God has done in your life? Have you forgotten the promises He has made and kept? Have you forgotten the comfort He has given you in that hospital room, in that foxhole, on that lonely night when you were all alone? Do we forget the love He has given us? The patience He has shown us again and again? The mercy He has shown us? The grace He has given us over and over? We get so wrapped up in the pettiness of the circumstances about us that we forget what it was like to be without Christ. We were dead men and women living in human bodies. We need to go back to Bethel for a fresh reminder of the grace of God. We need to drive a stake in the ground to remind us in the years to come of what God has done.

Finally, we need to go back to Bethel for a new beginning. God took Jacob back to where it all began and gave him again the promises he had already heard so that he could start over. You may not be pleased with the progress you have made in your Christian life. You may have been in bondage and need to be set free. Take heart. Christianity is a life of new beginnings. You cannot have the years back, you cannot have the tears back, but you can have the joy back. You can have the purpose back. You can have the commitment back. You can review the promises and renew your promises and begin again. It is never too late.

That is the miracle of Christianity. His compassions they fail not, they are new every morning, great is His faithfulness. Every day is a new sunrise. Every day is a new beginning. Every new year offers a whole new slate of Christ-filled days. Often times we need to go back to Bethel where it all began. We need to say, "Lord, if I had it to do over again, I would have been more faithful. Lord, if I had it to do over, I would be more devoted. Lord, if I had it to do over, I would be more yielded, more sensitive. Lord, if I had it to do over, You would have first place in my life." It is as if God would look at us and say, "You cannot do it over, but you have it to do now. Begin again." Satan will tell you it can't be done. You are too far down the road. Don't take his word for it. He is a liar. You go back to Bethel and find out for yourself.

Jacob returned as God commanded. It didn't end his pressures. Life went on. Pain went on. Death went on. Circumstances went

Return to Bethel

on. But Jacob was not the same man. He had a fresh vision of God. He experienced a fresh reminder of what God had done. God gave him a brand new beginning. He was grateful. We also can go back to Bethel for a brand new beginning, and learn to be grateful as well.

RETURN TO BETHEL

God took Jacob to Bethel
And there it all began.
There God took hold of Jacob's life
And there revealed His plan.

Then God sent Jacob to Haran
There he was warmly received.
But there he experienced life's real trials,
And there he was deceived.

Jacob's next step was Peniel
The place of surrendering all
The place where he fearfully, finally,
Unconditionally, answered God's call.

Then God said, "Go back to Bethel,
Back to your spiritual birth."
There's no place for you like Bethel
There's no other place on earth
Where God can take you back in time
To when you said, "I do."
To when He heard your cry in love,
And took control of you.

There at Bethel you can worship
God in all His power.
There you can behold His face
Hour after hour.

There at Bethel all of life
Can pass before your view
And you can praise a mighty God
For what He's done for you.

And there at Bethel one more time
Renewed and cleansed of sin
You're free to give God everything
You're free to *start again*.

Return to Bethel

For Focus and Application

1- Before Jacob could have power as he passed by his enemies and before he could return to the joy of his salvation, he had to put away some things. Why do you think these concepts have been discarded by so many in the church today? What aspect of God's character makes it necessary for us to do those things?

2- Why do wrong relationships so corrupt the Christian? How can we reconcile our calling to go into the world, with our calling to not become part of the world? Can you give some personal illustrations of how it works or doesn't work for you?

3- Memorize II Corinthians 6:14-16.

4- What are some of the things in today's world that might be related to Satanic spirit worship? What kinds of books or games need we avoid? What kinds of things ought we to throw away or burn? Is this superstition, or is it Scriptural instruction? Why do you think this custom has been nearly discarded in our generation? Why is this so important for a new Christian to learn immediately?

5- Taking counsel from the world is a deadly danger for the believer. Why? Can you find a Scriptural basis for your answer? What ought you to look for in a counselor? In a mentor? Why is compromise in this area so dangerous?

6- Carefully read I Peter 4:1-19. Make a list of the things God condemns in that passage. Can you describe drunkenness? When is a person drunk? What are some of the things that make you drunk? What is the best cure for drunkenness? Is alcohol a drug? If so, how do you know?

7- Why is mental and physical adultery so despicable to God? What does it say, spiritually? What are some simple things we can do to protect our minds from the Satanic invasion of immorality the media projects upon us? Why don't we?

8- Jacob did three things when he arrived at Bethel.

a- He worshipped. Define worship. How often do you worship? How do you worship? Is the nature of God more real to you today than it was a year ago?

b- He remembered. Do you have a book of remembrance? Do you use it? Why not get help today in beginning one

Return to Bethel

or renewing that habit?

- c- He began again. Are you willing to do that today?
Purpose to get alone with God and make this day the beginning of the rest of your life.

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230

210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778

www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org • © Russell Kelfer

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