

Beth-el, the House of God

Genesis 28:1-5,10-22

Similarly, perhaps, to the majority of you who are hear or listening today, Jacob came unknowingly and unintentionally to God's house on this occasion of which we read in God's holy Word. His thoughts were not of God prior to this. His aim, His direction, His intention was not to visit, fellowship, or spend time with the living God. Even though prior to departing on his journey that had brought him to Beth-el, as we read in the earlier part of this chapter, he had been blessed by his father Isaac and been reminded of the everlasting covenant of God, he had not been seeking after God in any spiritually meaningful way.

Some of you were saved, turned from your sins and begotten again, in the house of God, in a meeting of one of the Lord's churches, though that was not perhaps what you had in mind before you went there. Your mind was perhaps on other things, worldly and personal problems, concerns, and priorities. Your thoughts were not of the God of heaven, His everlasting dealings with mankind on the basis of His everlasting covenant, and the Testator of that Covenant by way of whom, in whom, through whom, and for whom the blessings of God descend from heaven to men, and on account of which God in heaven is glorified. You were not mindful of the angels of God, those ministering spirits, who run errand between heaven and earth on the behalf of the heirs of salvation and eternal life. You were not mindful of the Angel or Messenger of the Covenant, who came down from heaven in the likeness of sinful flesh, took on Himself the seed of Abraham through the line of Jacob, and upon whom the angels of God ascended and descended. But God, in His great mercy and love toward you, He being mindful of His covenant engagements and eternal promises, made manifest the counsels of your heart as He made known to you the counsel of His heart, in that He had given His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as the propitiation for your sins, that you might become an heir of God and a participant beneficiary in the gracious and everlasting covenant of redemption. It was not made known to you in a dream or vision, as with Jacob; but it was made known to you by the preaching of the gospel and the work of the Spirit convicting you of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come.

Beloved, that's what God's house is, first and foremost, the meeting place of God with men. And if we say that it is the

Beth-el, the House of God

meeting place of God with men, we must say that it is the meeting place of God with sinners, for all are sinners separate, apart from, and outside of Jesus Christ. It is the place where sinners may come before an holy God and find out the way of holiness, the way in which a sinner may be free of sin and sinner, may be forgiven all their sin-guiltiness, and may become holy, because without holiness no man shall see the Lord. You won't be saved because of coming to church; but God's house is a good place to be saved, through the hearing of faith and belief of the truth. You won't be saved because your name is listed on a church's membership roll; and some whose names were already listed on a church's membership roll after having made a false profession of faith later had Christ revealed unto them in God's house and made a true profession of faith and then became genuine and sincere members of that church of the living God.

This place upon which Jacob lighted in his weary journey was perhaps an unlikely place, from his human perspective, in which to find out marvelous things about the living God, the God in whose hand his very breath was held, the God to whom not only he was known, but the God who foreknew him from before the foundation of the world. To some, the meeting place with God and His people, the house of God, is an unlikely place in which to receive the blessings of God. The children of Israel in the Old Testament, God's commandments to the contrary notwithstanding, always preferred to worship at some high place or other. We read throughout the historical books of the Old Testament of the high places, and their continually resorting to them, when God had said even before they came into the land of Canaan that He desired not to be worshipped in such places, but in the place that He would choose to set His name there. But those places seemed more suitable to their minds. People today are fond of forsaking the assembly of the Lord Jesus where they ought to come to meet with the One who died on Calvary's tree and who sits at the right hand of God making intercession for all whom the Father gave Him in the eternal covenant, and instead they favor places that are more suitable to their minds than to God's. They find God's house uncomfortable. I can't think of what could be more uncomfortable than having stones for pillows, as Jacob did at Beth-el; and yet what tremendous blessings were communicated to Him at Bethel! It was at Beth-el that the course of his life was changed, from serving the flesh to serving God. It was to Beth-el he would ultimately have to return in later years in

Beth-el, the House of God

order to put his life back on the course it ought to have been for the honor and the glory of God. Many find God's house unattractive, either to their fleshly eyes or the worldly minds. It is not what they think it ought to be. And yet, beloved, it is the place where you can meet with God as you ought, where you can find out the truth of God as you ought, and where you can put and keep your life in order as you ought.

At Beth-el, God revealed things to Jacob that Jacob would otherwise not have known. Now there were things that his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham knew. They had talked about them to Jacob and in his hearing. And yet, like Jacob, God had to reveal these things unto Isaac, and unto Abraham before him, personally, just as He revealed them to Jacob personally. **Gen. 28:5-9** Esau, frankly, did not have a clue. He did not understand anything that was going on as far as the blessings of God were concerned. He thought that blessings came from his daddy, and so he did everything he thought he could do to make his daddy happy. A lot of people do that still. They go to the church they go to, observe the things they observe, practice the things they practice, because they think it makes their mommy or their daddy happy, and that making mommy and daddy happy is some way in which to obtain the sort of blessings they crave. You ought to honor your father and your mother; but you ought to do that because you delight to honor God who tells you to honor father and mother, and because you desire above all other things His blessing, and to please Him. You need to know God, you need to know Jesus as your own personal Savior, and you need to walk in the truth and in fellowship with God, whether your mommy, daddy, grandma, grandpa, favorite aunt, favorite uncle, favorite son, favorite daughter, or favorite friend does so or not. **Matt. 16:13-17** Jacob needed God to reveal Himself to him personally, and thanks be to God that He did!

As I said already, Jacob had heard of these things before. He had perhaps even pretended to be interested in them. He had, as we know, tricked his daddy, with the help of his mommy, into getting the blessing from his daddy. But it does not matter how much your daddy or your mommy called you "blessed," it must be the Lord who blesses you, or blessed you will never be. People think they can declare themselves blessed. That is not a new phenomenon, but has always been true. Adam thought he could disobey God, obey his devil-deceived wife, and still be blessed. Cain, instead of seeking God's blessing God's way, murdered his

Beth-el, the House of God

brother and sought to be the course of his own blessing. Most people equate earthly prosperity and temporal success with blessing. That is about the lowest form of blessing there, and it is the least and the shortest in duration. **Ps. 49:16-20** Jacob had been like a beast in understanding before coming to Beth-el. That's how we are. We have about as much understanding as the dumb animals of the field and forest, until we come into God's house and God makes Himself and the truth known unto us. **Ps. 73:15-17,21,22**

Yes, Jacob had heard these things before. The sad fact was that he was not living in the realization and the joyful knowledge of them, until he went to "the house of God" and they were revealed to him by the Spirit of God. It's not enough to hear the truth. The truth must become part of you. Many have heard with the ear, but never with an heart of faith, so that the Word of God has become grafted to their soul. **James 1:18-27** It is "*the engrafted word*" that makes one a child of God, a follower of the Lord Jesus, and an heir of God's eternal covenant blessings. Otherwise, a person will be nothing more than an outward imitator, putting on a religious performance, never having actually personally tasted that the Lord is gracious.

All Jacob thought of doing when he arrived at Beth-el was sleeping. That's all some folks think of doing when they come to God's house, and that is what many actually do. Some sleep, some snore, some dream, some daydream, and some are spiritually asleep, unawakened and unaroused to the realities of spiritual things, the life to come, the needs of their own souls, the God who made them, the peril and plight of souls around them, and the judgment to come. They leave God's house no better than when they arrived because their hearts were unaffected by the Word of God, and the knowledge of God who is revealed thereby. Sinners and backsliders will continue in their spiritually drowsy and slumbering condition all the way to hell if God does not awaken them. If you expect the preacher, the choir, the song service, the children's choir, the Sunday School teacher, or anyone or anything else to awaken a dead sinner from the deadness of their sins and make them spiritually alive, you are a fool. Only He who has almighty resurrecting power to raise the dead can do that. That's why people behave so foolishly when they come to God's house, because they expect some person to make them act or think or behave or feel a certain way, when all the while God must do a saving, reviving, sanctifying, illuminating work in and upon them.

Beth-el, the House of God

No wonder some folks don't pay any more attention to the preaching and teaching of God's Word than they do, and don't behave with more sober-mindedness than they do in church services, don't worship and praise God with all their heart, don't make melody in their heart or a joyful noise with their mouths to God, and aren't more considerate about what comes out of their mouths and every other part of their person when in God's house – they are unmindful of the God whose house it is, unexpecting of His glorious and dreadful presence, and undesirous of His almighty and supernatural blessings. And yet, be they as tired, as unaware, as unexpecting, and as uninterested as Jacob was as he lay down to sleep with his head upon the stones of Beth-el, God is not bound or constrained by human stupidity, stubbornness, or slumber. He can command the dead to rise and live, and they rise and live. He can command a Jacob to dream and see the vision of God's covenant blessings being communicated between heaven and earth to a wretched worm of a man fleeing from the hatred of his elder brother and the favoritism of his short-sighted parents, a wretched worm of a man through whose descendants God would bring the Savior of sinners into the world in the likeness of sinful flesh to be bruised and wounded for such as worm as I!

Before Jacob left Beth-el, he called upon God in prayer. But before he ever called upon God in prayer, he was called upon by the God who answers prayer. In fact, prior to this, there is no record of Jacob having ever prayed. And very well may have been useless for him to do so prior to this, because his heart was not in the right condition before God prior to this. Some people think they pray, and yet they think that their prayers have merit with God because of themselves. They think they are just as good as anyone else, and they know how to pray just as well as anyone else. And they have no knowledge or understanding of the fact that the only thing that can cause their prayers to be acceptable to God is the mediation, intercession, and propitiation of the dear Son of God, who as the dear Lamb of God laid down His own life, as the great High Priest offered the only acceptable sacrifice for sin unto God, His own precious blood, and who is the only mediator between God and men. Before you can really and truly call upon God, you need God to call upon you. Before you can truly visit the throne of grace, you need the God of grace to visit you. Before you can name the name of Jesus in faith and prayer, you need Jesus to make Himself known to you in saving repentance and faith. You know that is one of the hallmarks of a

Beth-el, the House of God

person who has been born of God, after having been born of God, they pray, and they live by prayer. *“Behold, he prayeth,”* (Acts 9:11), is what the Lord told old Ananias about Saul of Tarsus after Saul had seen the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus and been converted from a blaspheming, injury-causing, persecutor of Christ and Christians to an apostle of Christ and preaching of the gospel of Christ and Him crucified.

After he had been to Beth-el, not only did Jacob pray, but he tithed. When you become a participant beneficiary of the covenant of God, you are to live by God’s blessings and God’s commandments. You know, that’s a turn-off to some people, praying and tithing. And yet it is a mark of God’s grace upon a person’s life, that they live in obedience to and dependence upon God. And you are not obeying God when you are not depending on Him. And you are not depending on Him when you are not obeying him.

“Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not.”

Beloved, Jesus promised His kind of New Testament assembly, or church, *“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them,”* (Matt. 18:20). We don’t have to worry about His presence, unless like the church at Laodicea, we’ve become so lukewarm and disgusting to Him, that He stands outside, knocking on the door, to see if anyone in the church wants to truly have fellowship with Him. It was to His churches that the Lord Jesus unfolded and opened the book of God’s plan for the ages, and sent and signified it by His servant John, as the last book of scripture. It is in God’s house that we learn the will, plan, and purpose of God. It is in God’s house that we serve and worship Him. It is in God’s house where sinners ought to be able to meet the Savior, through whom all who come unto God by Him out of every kindred, nation, language, people, tribe, and family of the earth are blessed and blessed forever with spiritual blessings in heavenly places.

Are you saved today? Have you believed on the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you followed Him in scriptural baptism? Have you put your lamp upon the lampstand of His kind of New Testament assembly? Are you walking in fellowship with the Lord? Is your life being lived in obedience to His will and Word? Are you ready for His soon appearing, and to stand and give account of yourself unto Him, the judge of living and dead? Are you looking forward with hopeful expectation and joy to dwelling in the house of the Lord forever?