

BACK TO BETHEL

Separation from Sin, and Fellowship with GOD

by

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"Old Testament Heroes," "Meet for the Master's Use," etc.

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CHAPTER ONE

ARISE, GO UP TO BETHEL

You will find the verses from which I am to speak in Genesis 35:1.

"And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there, and make thee an altar unto God. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods from among you, and be clean."

Bethel is not more than ten or fifteen hundred feet above the sea, a waste moorland, as we should say in our country, strewn with great boulders. The name means the *House of GOD*. How did it get that name?

Thirty years before the words of my text were spoken, Jacob, fleeing from his father's house to avoid the anger of Esau, came there on the first night of his absence from home. You must think of him as a pilgrim exile, with his staff in hand, no escort, nothing of household gear, coming upon that moorland, making what bed he could upon the heather, and lying down to sleep, with the stars above him and the wild wind beating across the waste. His last vision was of those stones that lay strewn around him; and as he slept these were piled one upon the other until from his couch there arose the ladder up and down which the angels trooped, coming down to him in blessing and going up to GOD in prayer. There he heard the voice of GOD, and as the morning broke and the vision faded and the sunshine lighted up the world, he vowed that from that moment GOD should be his GOD and he His faithful servant.

I want to carry you back to days long gone by, it may be thirty years ago, when you left your father's house in some country district as a young man or girl, and entered into some great city. Do you remember your first night there, and the tiny bedroom in which you knelt to say your evening prayer, and felt so lonesome and solitary? As you remained in the attitude of devotion it seemed as though the GOD of your old father and mother came very near you and spoke to your heart, and you promised from that night to be His faithful servant, so that until you died He would always find you ready to do His will.

I want to know whether those vows have been kept? Has not that angel vision faded from your eyes? Has not that ladder died back into the dark? Have you not forgotten, or at least evaded, your solemn covenant? That young woman got a situation. She soon found herself beloved by one who could make a home for her. She and he together have climbed the ladder of prosperity, and she is now at the head of a beautiful home, and the angel ladder that linked her with GOD has faded away. She has drifted upon the current of fashion and worldliness. She is further away from GOD tonight than she was that other night so long ago. That young man has become one of your leading citizens. He is making money rapidly, but the promises have died upon his lips, and he is now further away from the GOD of his father than on the night he commenced his lonely pilgrimage.

I am perfectly sure that I am speaking to some Jacobs that need to have the call of GOD addressed to them, saying,

"Arise, go up to Bethel! Get away to the moor land plain! Get back to where you were thirty years ago, and at the foot of GOD's ladder of fellowship again covenant yourselves to Him, and dedicate your life to His service."

From Bethel Jacob traveled forth to Padan-Aram where he met Rachel. She became his beautiful wife. He had loved her at first sight, and stayed in Padan-Aram, serving seven years for Leah, seven years for Rachel and six years for his cattle and flocks. But they were like a few days for the love he had for Rachel. Years afterwards he started to return to his father's house, with a large and wealthy following. He had difficulty in getting away from Laban, and you remember how the angels of GOD escorted him, though he had proved himself unfit to receive their help. This man who had seen the angel vision stooped to do things while in Laban's employ which were not worthy of a son of GOD. Just as you who professed so much have been doing things which would not stand the scrutiny of GOD's angels, and of which one day you must give account at the judgment seat.

WRESTLING AT JABBOK

However, GOD loved this man, and brought him down to Jabbok. I have been to Jabbok myself, not literally, but in spirit, for GOD cannot bear for us to live a low down life.

Let us picture that scene!

The stars shining above, the brook rushing down to the Jordan, the trees and shrubs overhanging it! Rachel the beloved, Leah and the children, the flocks and herds had all gone forward, and Jacob was left alone. And the angel of GOD met him. (Genesis 32:24).

Too often that wonderful scene has been used as a symbol of wrestling prayer, but it is not meant to be taken only in that sense. It seems to me that it was not Jacob who wrestled with the angel, but the angel who wrestled with Jacob. It was as though GOD knew it was his only chance. He wanted to lift Jacob up to a new royal life, and so He actually wrestled with him as though to compel him to yield to Him. Jacob was a proud man. He stood his ground and resisted the effort of the angel to humble him. He struggled. He antagonized the angel of GOD's love.

It was only when the angel put forth his hand and touched the sinew of his thigh, which shriveled as a cord in the flame, and the man was no longer able to resist, that he cast his arms around the angel and said:

"I yield, I yield! But I will not let thee go until thou bless me!"

The angel blessed him, and said: "**What is thy name?**"

He answered: "Jacob supplanter, cheat, mean, crafty."

The angel said, "No more Jacob, but Israel! GOD wants you to leave all that behind and step up into a royal life."

Did you ever have that experience in your life? I had it twenty years ago, and I think many another can point back to some secret hour when GOD's angel came to lift him back into princeliness, and make him the servant of GOD.

Perhaps when your wife lay at the point of death the angel came, and you vowed if GOD would spare her to you, you would live a worthy, godly life. You remember, woman, that time when your first babe was dangerously ill. You sat at the bedside and lifted up your heart to GOD and said: "If thou wilt spare my child I will renounce my worldliness, my low living, and I will live a true Christian life." That was your Jabbok, and you left it resolved that GOD and you would be forever in close and blessed fellowship.

But what happened the next day?

It seems too awful to tell, because it is so true not only of Jacob but of ourselves.

Esau met him, and instead of trusting GOD, Jacob gave him a lame excuse why he could not go with him (Genesis 33:13). As soon as Esau's back was turned the crafty Jacob turned in the opposite direction and made for a fat valley and land of pasture where his cattle and sheep could get all they needed, whilst his sons and himself could do a big trade with the men of Shechem. We are told he pitched his tent toward Shechem, and worse than that, he bought a parcel of a field.

He who had come of a pilgrim race, who ought to have trusted GOD and known that GOD would give him the whole land, became a freeholder and bought some real estate right over against Shechem, one of the worst cities of the country. For wealth and gain he threw himself and his wife and children into the closest possible contact with this city, and you will hear presently what came of it.

RACHEL'S INFLUENCE

I always think that just here Rachel's influence came in. I am not going to absolve man and say that he does not care for the world, but I am quite sure women often drive their husbands into

expenditures which they cannot afford, because they say: "We want to give our children a chance."

I always feel that Rachel's influence there was baleful upon Jacob's soul, and that she probably said:

"Husband, don't you think we ought to give our children some of the polish, some of the manners of our time? Don't you think it would be wise for them to come into contact with other people?"

Don't think that I am too hard on Rachel. Her own behavior is my justification. We know that when Laban came to Jacob and said somebody had stolen his household gods Jacob knew nothing about it, but as a matter of fact, Rachel had stolen them and hidden them with their goods.

Rachel no doubt knew of GOD, yet she had these little gods to which she gave her worship; and I cannot but feel that her influence was affected by the idolatry she was practicing.

I want to speak for a moment to women.

I want to ask whether in GOD's sight they are using for GOD that holy, religious influence which should pervade the home and mold the husband and the children. I want to ask girls to begin their relations with men upon such a basis that their influence over them may always be for good. If only girls would build up sweet and noble lives and refuse to do things which GOD would not approve, they would surely have an influence over their brothers and future husbands in all after time. Pledge yourself to GOD in all purity and chastity. Build up in good works a life so full of the jewelry of heaven that men will be compelled to seek you for your intrinsic worth.

If any woman has idols the idol of morphine, of worldliness or any other idol in GOD's name put it away! Can you allow filthy novels to eat out the very core of your heart and blast the purity and virtue which are your chief graces? In the name of GOD, I ask you, whatever secret idols you are worshiping, that you tear them from their throne and open your heart to JESUS CHRIST, so that you may have no influence for evil, but every influence for good.

Rachel ought to have been Jacob's good angel. She should have said:

"Husband, don't go there! Remember the children!"

But they drifted together, and for four or five years they lived near that prosperous, idolatrous city.

And what happened next?

We are told in Genesis 34 that Dinah, Jacob's only daughter, went out to see the daughters of the land. Poor child! She had been put in the way of temptation, and like a gnat she began to flit around the candle flame. It may be that home was irksome, it may be there was quarreling there among her brothers, it may be that she lacked tenderness and sweetness from those who lived

with her. So she took a step from which there was no stepping back. She lost her honor, and ultimately brought disgrace and shame upon her father's home.

Who was to blame for all that? Was not Jacob to blame for putting his children in that position?

Listen, you men who are making money! There is a tendency on the part of the Christian man, when he begins to make money, to say: "I can now live in a larger house. I can go into better society."

Too often acting thus, you place your children under that influence which is to them what Shechem was to Jacob. What is the result? Your children at once begin to get worldly notions. They go into balls and dances and theaters. You expose your sons and daughters to companions who will lead them to perdition. I don't say you ought to deny your children education or anything which makes life bright and happy for them, but I do say when you have given your family a house according to your means and provided for the education and pleasure and recreation of your children, you ought to look upon the increase of your prosperity as a talent from GOD. You should use anything that is over and above what is necessary for you and your family for the service of GOD, accounting yourself His steward and entrusted with His goods.

Six, seven years passed like that, and culminated in a tragedy that compelled Jacob to be gone. Oh, that I were eloquent! Oh, that I could paint for you where you are living! Oh, that I could compare the angel-haunted ladder of Bethel with Shechem! If I could make you see that contrast, you would not need an angel voice to say to you:

"Arise, go back to Bethel," but, making all haste, you would get back to the glorious heights where GOD meets the soul. When GOD spoke to Jacob he turned to his household and all that were with him, and said:

"Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments; and let us arise and go up to Bethel."

I would touch the harp of memory, the memory of those past days when you were near GOD. Won't you return to Bethel, where the angels go and come?

I remember once going to a meeting of the Salvation Army where they had advertised an exhibition of idols. I expected to see idols from India and Africa and the South Seas, but instead of that eight young men, at the appointed time, stepped to the rear of the platform and returned, each bearing a large piece of cardboard. One card was covered with pipes and cigars and tobacco; another with sham jewelry, feathers, ribbons and things of that sort. There were eight cards, each covered with things that had been idols to some.

A man sitting behind me pointed and said: "That was my pipe."

A woman said: "See my bow of ribbon?"

Those simple people felt that these things had become idols to them, and they had given them up.

I am not here to say that tobacco or jewelry is your idol, because if I did, a great many who are not tempted in these directions would say, "He doesn't mean me; I have no idol"; which would not be true. For a good many men the idol is money; for many women it is their beauty, or their skill in music, or perhaps their beautiful homes. You may depend upon it that unless you have gone through the purging process everyone of you is tempted to have some secret throne upon which is your idol.

The Greek word for "**idol**" means "*appearance*." It is something which you trust in more than GOD whom you cannot see. If there is anything of that sort in your life, I pray you put it away!

But you ask, "How can you put these things away?"

There is only one way. Take them as GOD's gift. As soon as you begin to look upon them as His loan, the fear of their hurting you passes away, if they are legitimate. Test yourself and say:

"CHRIST, from henceforth I treat this as Thy gift to me, to be used for Thee!"

And, my friends, be clean! Clean in your heart, clean in what you see, clean in every word you speak, clean in every act, clean in the whole body! Never allow an expression which is capable of a double meaning. Never let a thought intrude which is not just what it should be. Don't look at those unclean pictures. Don't read those unclean books.

"**Change your garments!**" It may be you have dressed in polluted garments. I say to you, put off the old man and put on JESUS CHRIST, and say:

"I am going to live henceforth as JESUS CHRIST would live were He in my place."

Jacob did it, and he went back to Bethel, and a wonderful thing happened. GOD said to him: "**Your name shall no more be Jacob, but Israel.**"

Then He added, "**I am God Almighty**" as much as to say, "Jacob, you sought Shechem because you thought you would do better, and now you stand alone and wonder what is going to happen next. I am going to be with you. I am GOD Almighty. I will meet all demands. I will stand sponsor for you. Reckon on me. I will see you through."

Now look to JESUS! Open your heart to Him. Give Him your whole nature. Don't let there be any secrets. He will give you a new name. He will be to you GOD Almighty. He will make you fruitful and will multiply you. And may you and He live together in blessed fellowship until He makes up His jewels.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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