

=EVENTS FROM GENESIS=

Lesson 17

Back to Beth-el

AIM: to teach my pupils the steps that Jacob took back to God's will.

POINT OF CONTACT: Use some earrings. Show them to the class and ask them what they are, what they represent. One of the last things that Jacob did to get right with God was to have his wives and children dispose of their earrings. There was a reason for this. Ask the class if they can guess the reason. Of course, they will not be able to guess. Have them listen carefully to the lesson and see if they can find the reason for Jacob's family disposing of their earrings.

INTRODUCTION: For many years Jacob had been outside of the will of God. He had left home originally because Esau, his brother, was angry with him. He had come to Padan-aram, had married, had a family and much possessions. However, God still wanted him back at Beth-el. He wanted him back at the place of blessing. Let us notice the steps of Jacob's return to Beth-el.

- I. AS SOON AS JACOB STARTED BACK TO BETH-EL, THE ANGELS OF GOD MET HIM. In Genesis 32:1, the word "met" indicates that they "ran to meet him." The moment a person starts back to the will of God, God sends messengers to run to meet him and help him back to God. What a beautiful picture! Jacob had seen these angels before in his ladder dream. Now those angels are so glad to see him coming back to Beth-el that they run to meet him and bring him back.
- II. MAHANAIM IS THE NAME OF THE PLACE WHERE JACOB MET THE ANGELS. Notice this in Genesis 32:2. There is a reason for this. The word "Mahanaim" means "two hosts." The angels were divided into two groups. There is a reason for this too. Laban was Jacob's enemy behind him; Esau was Jacob's enemy in front of him. Jacob was afraid to go back and afraid to go forward; hence, God gave him angels before him and angels behind him. There were two hosts protecting him as he came back to the will of God.
- III. WHEN A PERSON COMES BACK TO BETH-EL, HE IMMEDIATELY DESIRES TO GET RIGHT WITH HIS BROTHER. See Genesis 32:3-5. Jacob had tricked Esau, stolen his birthright, and tricked from him his father's blessings. They had been parted for many years—some say for nearly 30 years. As soon as Jacob desired to get back to Beth-el and get right with God, he desired to get right with his brother. In these verses he made necessary plans to do so.
- IV. JACOB WENT TO GOD IN PRAYER. This is found in Genesis 32:9. When a person gets back to Beth-el, his prayer life is straightened up. Notice the fact also that Jacob claimed what God had said as his hope to get back. Notice he said, "...O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country..." Jacob claimed the promise of God. No prayer is effective unless it reminds God of His promises and claims them.
- V. JACOB BECAME HUMBLE. Notice in Genesis 32:10 the words, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies..." This is not the same Jacob who left, is it? This is not the Jacob who tricked Esau, the one who stole the blessing; this is a new Jacob! One who comes back to Beth-el always is humble. He sees his own faults, not the faults of others.
- VI. JACOB WRESTLED WITH GOD. This tremendous story is found in Genesis 32:24-28. Notice several things about it.
  1. Jacob was alone. We must spend time alone if we expect to be with God.
  2. The one Who wrestled with Jacob was Jesus Christ Himself. In Hosea 12:4 this "man" is termed "the angel," which means "the angel of the Lord," or in other words, Jesus Christ is the angel of the Lord, God's main messenger.
  3. The power of God was evident. It is also interesting that in Genesis 32:25b it says, "...he (*God*) touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint..." Notice the

power of God—He simply touched Jacob’s thigh, and it was out of joint. God can touch any of us. Just a touch could affect our physical well-being.

4. Jacob’s name was changed to Israel. Israel means “a prince.” A man is called a prince when he comes back to Beth-el, desires to get right with his brother, and wrestles with God.
  
- VII. JACOB CAME TO THE RIVER JABBOK. In Genesis 32:22, the word “Jabbok” means “empty.” Jacob emptied himself. No person can be in the will of God unless he first empties himself.
  
- VIII. JACOB HUMBLER HIMSELF BEFORE ESAU. You will notice in Genesis 33:3 that Jacob bowed himself down to the ground seven times. Seven is the number of completeness. Jacob was willing to be completely submissive to his brother. What a change takes place when a person gets back to Beth-el! Complete submission is our need.
  
- IX. JACOB WAS FORGIVEN BY ESAU. See Genesis 33:4. God had worked on the heart of Esau. Even as Jacob was coming to meet him, Esau held no bitterness, attempted no vindication. God had prepared him. Each of us should have the same spirit. Grudges, bitterness, criticism, etc. should not be a part of the Christian life.
  
- X. JACOB HAD A DESIRE TO GIVE AND TO SHARE. See Genesis 33:9, 10. Jacob had stolen from Esau. The new Jacob who is a prince with God desires to give to Esau and share with him. What a beautiful picture it is in these verses to see Jacob trying to give and Esau trying to get him to keep his possessions!
  
- XI. JACOB STOPPED SHORT OF BETH-EL. Notice Genesis 33:18-20. Here is a sad portion of Jacob’s return to Beth-el. He is within 20 miles of Beth-el; yet he stops, purchases property, and lives there. Some say he lived here around seven years. This is too sad for words. So close to Beth-el, so much progress has been made, and yet he stops short. He certainly paid for this, too. Chapter 34 teaches the horror, the adultery, the murder, etc. in which his children became involved because Jacob stopped short of Beth-el. When we rear our children short of the house of God and the will of God, we can expect tragedies to come in their lives. When young people do not build their lives around the house of God, they can expect something less than the best God has for them.
  
- XII. GOD STILL CALLS BACK TO BETH-EL. See Genesis 35:1. It doesn’t matter whether one is in Padan-aram, 500 miles away, or in Shechem, 20 miles away; God still wants complete surrender. The person who is close to Beth-el but not in Beth-el is just as much a backslider as a person in Padan-aram, 500 miles away. Jacob is still away from God, still a backslider, because he has stopped short of Beth-el.
  
- XIII. JACOB LEADS HIS FAMILY TO PUT AWAY THEIR STRANGE GODS. Notice in Genesis 35:2-4, a very interesting thing—they not only gave up their gods, but their earrings also. There is a reason for this. Earrings were frequently used in idolatrous practices. This is shown in the example of Aaron, who made the calf out of the golden earrings while Moses was on Mount Sinai. See Exodus 32:2. Hosea 2:13 says, “And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the LORD.” Jacob buried the earrings because earrings in those days were used as objects of worship and oftentimes as instruments with which to make gods and idols. Jacob wanted no trace of idolatry. He sold out completely to God. He is going back to Beth-el!
  
- XIV. JACOB RETURNS TO BETH-EL. See Genesis 35:6, 7. There is something interesting about this, however. He calls it now “El-beth-el.” The prefix “El” means “God.” “Beth-el” means “house of God.” “El-beth-el” means “The God of the house of God.” No longer is the house of God the most important (though it is important), but God is the most important!

CONCLUSION: The place called Beth-el has tremendous significance in the Bible. A progression of words over this one place, Beth-el, is interesting to note:

1. It first was called Luz, which means “departure.” Jacob was departing from his homeland when he came here.
2. Then it was called Beth-el, which means “the house of God.”
3. Later it was called El-beth-el, which means “the God of the house of God.”
4. Later the word “El” was dropped, and it became Beth-el again. This means that God became less important. He was not on the front—He was on the back.
5. Later the “El” on the back was dropped. No longer is God’s name found at all. It was called Beth-Avon, which means “House of Emptiness.”
6. Later on the word “Beth” was dropped—no trace of its original name remained. What a picture of many churches and Christians!