

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: January 27, 2019
Lesson Title: "Assurance"
Lesson Passage: Gen. 35:1-15

ABOUT THIS LESSON

The lesson passage tells the story of Jacob's return to Bethel, and probes the spiritual meaning of that experience.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Explain the meaning of the "back to Bethel" experience in Jacob's life and (2) suggest its implications for today's Christian.

BEGINNING THE SESSION

Read Jer. 23:24 ("Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord") and Acts 7:48 ("Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands"). Then comment: The Bible makes it clear that God is Lord over all the earth, and is not confined to specific places of worship. However, many of us have discovered that there are particular places where we find it easier to sense the presence of God. For some, that place is a country church house; others feel close to God in a setting surrounded by natural beauty. Ask class members to tell about places where they have felt particularly close to God. Then note that Bethel seems to have been such a place for Jacob (and Abraham before him--Gen. 13:3-4).

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Locate Bethel on a classroom map, and ask the class to recall what happened when Jacob was there (recall the study of Gen. 28:10-22 on Dec. 9).

2. Review once again the events in Jacob's life between his two visits to Bethel. (Use a map to trace his journeys.) (1) He traveled eastward (Gen. 29:1), to the northern Arabian desert (where modern Jordan and Syria are located). There he married the daughters of Laban (Leah and Rachel) and worked in Laban's employ for 20 years (31:43). During this time, he became a prosperous man (30:43). (2) Then the Lord, identifying Himself as "the God of Bethel" (31:13), commanded Jacob to return to Canaan, the land of his kindred. (3) Jacob then returned to Canaan, where he wrestled with the angel at Peniel and survived his long-dreaded encounter with Esau (last week's lesson). (4) He then went to Shechem, where he took up permanent residence (33:18). But, in Shechem his family was involved in a tragic episode (Gen. 34) that gave them a bad reputation among their neighbors (34:30).

3. Discuss Jacob's return to Bethel:

HE SHOULD HAVE RETURNED TO BETHEL SOONER. Call attention to God's instructions to Jacob in 35:1, then ask: Why didn't Jacob go to Bethel immediately upon coming back to Canaan?" (After all, that is where he had experienced the vision of God [28:12] and had vowed to return to build an altar there [28:20-22].) Suggestions: (1) Bethel was located in rocky hill country; it was easier to live in Shechem, on the fertile slope of Mt. Ebal. (2) Perhaps Jacob was reluctant to face God at Bethel because he had not kept his promise to tithe (Gen. 28:22). (3) Or was he afraid that, after 20 years, Bethel just wouldn't be the same, that he could never relive the thrill of his previous experience?

JACOB PAID A TERRIBLE PRICE FOR POSTPONING THE RENEWAL OF HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GOD OF BETHEL. Genesis 34 records a terrible episode in the life of Jacob. His daughter, Dinah, was sexually violated by one of the young men of Shechem (34:2), a son of Hamor. In retaliation, the sons of Jacob slaughtered Hamor, his son and all the men of their city; and they took their women captive, and carried off all their livestock (34:25-29). This placed Jacob and his family in terrible jeopardy; for, now, the inhabitants of the area would seek revenge. Had Jacob restored his family's relationship with the God of Bethel sooner, this sad state of affairs could have been avoided. **APPLICATION:** To what degree is the breakdown of family life today attributable to neglect of spiritual nurture within the home?

THE EXPERIENCE OF SPIRITUAL RENEWAL BEGAN, AS SUCH EXPERIENCES ALWAYS BEGIN, WITH CLEANSING AND PURIFICATION. (1) They put away their foreign gods (35:2,4) (remember the household idols Rachel had stolen from her father). (2) They cleansed themselves (v. 2). (3) They changed garments (a symbolic act signifying personal rededication). Suggest that God still requires these three things of those who seek spiritual renewal--forsaking other gods, cleansing, and changed lives.

4. Focus on three significant features of Jacob's return to Bethel, as described in 35:6-12: (1) **A vow fulfilled.** Verse 7 notes the actual fulfillment of the vow Jacob had made more than two decades earlier (**review Gen. 28:20-22**). (2) **A name changed** (v. 10). God now confirms what had previously been announced by His messenger (**see 32:28**); Jacob is renamed "Israel" ("a prince of God"). (3) **A covenant renewed** (v. 11). Jacob is reminded that he is heir to the covenant delivered to his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham. And he is also linked with the future destiny of a great nation. Out of his lineage would come kings (Saul, David, Solomon) and, in God's own time, the King of kings.

CLOSING THE LESSON

Close with this thought: There are times when many of us feel the need to "go back to Bethel" for spiritual renewal. But Bethel need not be a particular place. It can be found in our hearts.