

Jacob 8

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 November 1997

Preacher: Rev Kenneth Stewart

[0 : 0 0] Seeking the Lord's blessing, we'll turn to the portion of scripture we read, Genesis chapter 35, and verse 1 of the chapter.

And God said to Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there, and make there an altar unto God that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.

And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel. The last Sabbath we saw how Jacob fell gradually into a state of spiritual declension when he lived in the place called Shechem.

And he did that because of his prosperity and largely because of fear of some of his own family. And in his prosperity, he forgot the vow which he had made at Bethel many years before.

And so he rested, in a sense, on his lease in Shechem, and he forgot to be a pilgrim. He bought a well there, he built a house, and he bought a small piece of land.

[1 : 3 5] And over a period of ten years, he gradually declined spiritually. And then the Lord laid his hand upon him by way of chastisement again.

And that happened with the defilement of his daughter, Dinah, which we looked at last week. And the hand of chastisement was also upon him in the way in which his two sons worked vengeance for themselves in the light of that.

And they slew the men of Shechem for the rape of their own sister, Dinah. And in these things, Jacob was conscious that the hand of the Lord had fallen upon him in chastisement.

And he begins to fear, as we saw last week. He said to his sons, after their vengeance, You have troubled me to make me stink among the inhabitants of this land.

And they shall gather themselves together against me and slay me, and I shall be destroyed, I and my house. So you have a picture there of a man who is conscious that the Lord has visited him.

[2 : 3 5] He has lost his boldness. He has lost his strength and his courage. And he's become fearful. And he knows that he's under the displeasure of God. And so he turns, no doubt, to seek the Lord's face.

And to ask the Lord to show him the reason for his displeasure. Now when things come to us like that in Providence, it's good for us to do that. It's good for us to search and to examine ourselves as to whether we have somehow offended the Lord in a particular way.

To cause him to break out against us in this kind of way. And if it is a chastisement from the Lord, well, he will reveal that. I'll say a little more about that as I go on.

But if it is a chastisement upon you from himself, then he will reveal it. And he will reveal the cause of it. So Jacob, no doubt, examines himself at this point.

And when he turns to the Lord, God breaks into his experience powerfully with these words, Arise, the words of our text, and go up to Bethel and make there an altar to God who appeared unto you when you fled from the face of Esau, your brother.

[3 : 49] So Jacob immediately gets up and he puts his household in order. He puts his family in order. And they begin to make the journey to Bethel. And when he arrives there, he builds an altar to God.

And he worships God there. And he calls him this time the God of Bethel. You remember when he built an altar in Shechem, he called him the God of Israel. But this time he calls him the God of Bethel.

And God comes to him in Bethel. And he renews the promises to him. And he meets him almost face to face in particular intimacy and in blessedness.

Now, it's these things that I want to look at with you a little more closely. And especially the main doctrine or the main teaching that's brought before us in this passage, which is that of repentance.

Because the passage is primarily concerned with repentance. What repentance is and how it works in the life of a believer.

[4 : 51] And indeed in the life of the unbeliever who is turning to the Lord for the first time. We'll see how it is the same repentance essentially in both cases. Now, the first thing to notice about this repentance is that it's a response to the command of God.

It's God who comes and who says to Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Now, I want to look first at the expression, go up to Bethel.

Now, that carries with it two things. Or that expression, go up to Bethel, is designed to do two things to Jacob himself. In the first place, it is designed to bring home powerfully to Jacob what his sin actually is.

And if Jacob is unsure why the Lord has broken out against him in such a way. And why he has visited the family in such a way. Then God will tell him clearly now what it is.

Arise, he says, and go up to Bethel. That place where you vowed and which you promised to visit once I would free you and bless you and bless you abundantly.

[6 : 04] You have neglected it and you have delayed it. And you have delayed it because of your sin. Your prosperity kept you back from going to that place and performing a spiritual duty.

So I am reminding you now to go up to Bethel. Now, I said a minute ago that if God is chastising us, he'll tell us why.

Now, that stands to reason. If your own child was misbehaving and you took your child and you chastised him and you just left it at that. And he had no clue whatsoever why you had smitten him in this way.

If he was just left there wondering what it was all about, then that would obviously do more harm than good. It would do more harm than good. It's involved in chastisement that the word accompanies the blow.

Or that the word of teaching or the word of explanation accompanies the blow from the hand of God. And only then will chastisement become profitable.

[7 : 08] And I should say that perhaps to complement what I said last week about the necessity of chastising. And of physically chastising of children which the Bible commends. Along with that, there should be an explanation of why.

A clear explanation of why that the child is able to bear and able to sustain. Only then will chastisement do its corrective instructive work. And if you seek the face of God, God will give you the reason for the chastisement.

And when you come and inquire of him, he will reveal to you what it is. And that is why he comes to Jacob in power here. And he says, arise and go up to Bethel.

It is Jacob because you are in Shechem. And because you have been Shechem for ten years that I have come and that I have smitten you in this way. No doubt you thought that one day you would make your way to Bethel.

But for the moment, the land at Shechem is good. Your sons are pressing you to stay. There is the opportunity for prosperity. For the first time in twenty years, you can have a piece of land you can call your own.

[8 : 11] You can have a house you can call your own. And a well you can call your own. And these worldly considerations come before making the journey to Bethel. Which wasn't such a hospitable place to live in.

It was just not that. It was not as hospitable as Shechem. But my friends, has Jacob forgotten his strife, his anguish and bitterness of soul twenty years before?

That's dated from the time he arrived in Shechem. Twenty years before. Has he forgotten all that? It's quite remarkable how worldly things can keep you back from spiritual duties.

And when they do, the Lord will visit you for it. I wonder what you put before the prayer meeting yourself. I wonder what you put before the house of God.

Or if there's a fellowship down the road somewhere. I wonder what you put before that. How many worldly things can creep in. And don't think that the hand of the Lord will stay up without coming down upon us.

[9 : 13] When we put worldly things like that. Before his own cause. And before our own vows. And so that's why God brings it before him. And when he brings it before him. He feels like the psalmist.

He says, against thee, thee only, have I sinned. My transgressions I confess. My sin I ever see. Now when God is really dealing with us in a living way.

Then he brings our sins home to us. Just like that. He makes us to feel really that we have sinned against him. He makes us to feel it personally. That we have transgressed the holy commandment.

And he makes us to feel it in such a way. As though he and ourselves were alone in the universe. It is myself dealing with himself. Against thee and thee only have I sinned.

And that sin is before my face. And before my face continually. My friends, would that the Lord would bring us to that position. Where we could see our sins that clearly.

[10 : 16] But not only does go to Bethel bring his sin before him. It brings something else before him too. It brings before him Jacob's need to put his household right before God.

It is a call, in other words, to rededication. Or a recommitment to God and holiness. It is in many respects like a new beginning. Or a fresh start.

Go up to Bethel, Jacob. And dwell there. Dwell in my presence. As you have not been dwelling in my presence for these years.

Ah yes, Jacob has worshipped these years. And yes, at times he would have been conscious. Fleeting of the intimate presence of the Lord. But he did not have that real solid communication from God.

That he had had before. And that he was about to have again. He just did not have that. That sweetness of closeness and intimacy. It was a strange thing to him. Until he received the call powerfully from the word of God.

[11 : 23] To go back to Bethel. And to meet with the Lord himself there again. And that is what the altar symbolizes. Make there an altar to God.

What does an altar speak of? Well it speaks of forgiveness. It speaks of reconciliation. It speaks of meeting God through a sacrifice. It speaks of a burnt offering.

Of a consecration. Of a yielding of yourself to God. All these things are to be done at the altar. And Jacob is invited by God. As it were. To begin on a new footing.

And you'll notice how he says it. He doesn't merely say go up to Bethel. He says arise. Arise. Go up to Bethel. And the very word as it's given us is designed.

To give the impression of someone who's been. Slothfully at ease. Someone who's been in some kind of spiritual slumber. Or spiritual stupor.

[12 : 21] Someone who's been in a state of morbid apathy. Someone who is not moving. And who is not industrious in the way that he should be. He is sitting in the dust. And he is a shadow of what he ought to be.

He has allowed other things to take the place of the Lord. Rise up Jacob. Shake yourself out of the dust. And press forward to Bethel. And there I will meet with you at the altar.

And there I will bless you. It is as though God is saying to Jacob. Enough of being ruled by your family. Instead of ruling your family. It is as though God is saying to him.

Enough of your parcel of land. And of your well. And of your house. Enough of these things. Enough of the possessions. Enough of the goats. Enough of the cows. Enough of the herds. Get up.

And put your house in order. And appear before me in Bethel. And is that not a call to ourselves also? How often will God call us before we do the thing?

[13 : 23] To arise and to shake ourselves. Or how must he smite us? Before we cut loose from the idols. And before we meet with God. Arise Jacob.

And go up to Bethel. There is another one or two things I want to notice in connection with this commandment. First of all. I said that it is of God.

It is a command to repent. And it comes from God. And viewed in one perspective. That is a marvelous thing itself. It is not as though Jacob.

As it were says to himself. I must repent. It is God saying to Jacob. Repent. And come to Bethel. He is calling.

And he is reviving. And it is easy for us to believe that along with the call. And along with the summons. God gives the power to do so. Because God is dealing with his own covenant people.

[14 : 21] He doesn't just give them an empty word. But he accompanies the word with power. It is as though in saying arise that Jacob arises in the very act. Jacob is conscious of the strength to do it.

But from whom does the strength come? But from the Lord who calls him to do it. Arise Jacob. The time has come. And it is a sovereign call. God calls.

And God energizes. In other words. Without that. Jacob would remain in his stupor. And I would remain in my morbid apathy along with him.

It is of God's mercies that we are not consumed. Put it this way. How would it be if God said this? Ephraim is joined to idols.

Leave him alone. He said that about another people. Ephraim is joined to idols. Leave him alone. What solemn words these are.

[15 : 21] He could have said Jacob is joined to idols. Leave him alone. But he does not leave him alone. By the mercy of God he cannot leave him alone.

Christ died for him. And God will reach down again. And he will take hold of Jacob. And he will pull him out of these things. Arise Jacob.

And go up to Bethel. And that shows us the wonderful grace and mercy of God in doing it. It comes from himself. The call and the power to obey the call comes from himself.

Unless God equips you and empowers you. You will sit under a call to repentance for 50 years. In the hardness of your own heart.

In your own spiritual slumber will sit in it. And will stay in it. Or what cause to cry to God. That he might come and give a powerful invitation.

[16 : 25] Because you will notice. It is not only a command to repent. And this is very important. It is also. Well I can't use the expression. An invitation to repent. But I can put it this way.

Along with the command to repent. That is the invitation to come. The invitation to come. And that is included in the words. Make an altar unto God.

Because as I said. That speaks of reconciliation. Forgiveness. And mercy. God is not merely saying. Jacob do this.

But he is saying. Do this. And I will meet with you. Do this. And I will bless you. Do this. And we will speak. One with another.

And the blessing of almighty God. Shall rest. Upon you. In other words. No man can truly repent. Unless he sees.

[17 : 26] The grace of God. Or God's willingness to receive him. Or God's willingness. To have mercy. Upon him. That is necessary. You can turn from something.

Without that. But you can't turn. To God. Without that. You might. Out of a sense. Of your sin and misery. Cut yourself off. From many sins. In your life.

And it is a good thing. To do that. To cut yourself off. From things that are hampering you. But you will never. Truly. Embrace God. Unless you see.

Clearly. That God is. Embraceable. In the Lord. Jesus Christ. Christ. And unless you get a saving view. Of who Christ is. And what Christ has done.

And that is why. Along with every call to repentance. You find an invitation. As it were. To come. An invitation. To find mercy. And to find forgiveness. Arise. Go to Bethel.

[18 : 24] And make an altar there. Unto your God. In other words. Without hope. You can never have repentance. Despair. Will produce remorse.

Hope. Will produce repentance. If you've got nothing. But blackness. In front of you. It will only produce remorse. Like Judas Iscariot.

He saw nothing. But blackness. And he went out. Into the night. He only saw the night. And he went out. Into the night. That is remorse.

But where you see light. Shining in the darkness. That is repentance. It is a turning from. And a turning to. And an embracing of the Lord.

And it's wonderful. How the shorter catechism. Brings that before us. In answering the question. What is repentance? Amongst what it answers there. It says that the sinner. Out of a sense.

[19 : 21] Of the. Or an apprehension. Of the mercy. Of God in Christ. Doth turn from his sin. You'll notice how that's put in there. It's not just that he's conscious.

Of his sin and misery. But he has an apprehension. He spiritually. Or he in here. Apprehends. Or lays hold upon the fact. That's what apprehend means. It means. To lay hold upon the fact.

That God. Is merciful. In Christ. And it's in that. That he turns. And he embraces. Jesus. And that is what strengthens Jacob. To move. That's what strengthens him.

To go to Bethel. That God will meet him in Bethel. And that God will bless him in Bethel. And I want you to understand. The same thing. Regarding the cross. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. On the cross.

Christ will meet you. God will meet you. At that cross. It is not a matter of yourself. In your own energy. Just trying to reform. And trying to cast the evil spirit. Out of your life.

- [20 : 17] When that is done. If Christ is not laid hold. Of seven spirits. More wicked. Than the one you cast out. Will come in. And will inhabit you. Matthew 12. But if you. Out of a sense. Of God meeting you. In Christ. Turn from your sins. You will find that God. Empowers that turning. And he will drive you. As it were. All the way. To love Christ. To lay hold upon Christ.

To cleave to the Savior. And to follow him. And that is what empowers. Jacob. To move. Oh my friend. How good it would be. If even one soul. In here tonight.

Would be empowered. To move. And to move spiritually. To rise up. Out of Shechem. And to go to Bethel. To leave the city. Of destruction. And make your way.

To the celestial city. To leave darkness. And to embrace light. You ask for mercy. And you'll find mercy. You take up the cross.

- [21 : 12] And God will bless you. You come to Christ. And confess. That you have sinned. That you have come short. Of his. Of his law. That you have transgressed.

His holy commandment. Cast yourself down. Before him. And ask for his mercy. And forgiveness. And you will find that. Say to him. If you want. That I have no strength.

To travel the Christian way. Except you give it me. He will embrace you. And he will give you. That strength. Notice again. And. When the catechism deals with.

Repentance. It says this. That the sinner. Repenting. Must have a full purpose. Or he must be. Endeavoring. After. New. Obedience.

Now that must be in your heart. God. You must in your heart. Walk like him. To think like him. To be conformed. To his image. A full purpose.

- [22 : 07] And an endeavor. After a new obedience. You must have that. And by God's grace. You will have it. You will have it. Commit yourself.

And trust yourself to him. And you will have it. Arise. And go to Bethel. And Jacob gets up. And he goes. To Bethel. Now I want to look with you.

Again at the repentance. Itself. Notice in verse 2. How Jacob responds immediately. God has called with power. And immediately you find the result.

And Jacob says to his household. And to all that were with him. 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. And I will make there an altar unto God. Who answered me. In the day of my distress. And who was with me. In the way.

- [23 : 03] Which I went. Now. What you have here. Is repentance. Working itself out. In the life. Of Jacob. As soon as God comes to him.

Calling him powerfully. Jacob is seized. With the glory. And the holiness. And the majesty. Of God. First sign. When God comes.

It's always the first sign. When God comes into a soul. A congregation. A church. Or a nation. That nation. Congregation. Of soul.

Is seized. With a vision. Of the holiness of God. Of his righteousness. Of his purity. And you are constrained. To say.

Who shall ascend. Into the hill of God. Who can have fellowship. With the almighty. Who can stand. In the presence. Of the one.

- [23 : 59] Who is of pure aright. Than to behold. Iniquity. When God comes. His holiness. Is seen. And you become vile. You become vile.

Your sins. Are seen. By you. Clearly. Before your face. Just as God. Broke into the life. Of David. In a remarkable way.

After his. Own sin. And God. When God visited him. David could only see. The purity of God. And his own. Ugliness. Before him. My sin. He says.

I ever. See. And that is why. When a person. Is spoken to. By God. He immediately. Reforms his life. This is the way.

Repentance works. The spiritual. Vision. And energy. Comes into the soul. And it immediately. Transforms the life. And the sinner. Says. Who shall ascend. Into the hill of God.

[24 : 54] That man. Whose hands are clean. And whose heart is pure. And he immediately. Begins to wash his hands. To put out of his life. And to put out of his house. All. What offends.

The Lord. Jesus Christ. All that is opposed. Opposed. To the holiness of God. The sinner declares. Warfare on that. That is the first. And immediate.

Effect. Of God. Visiting. Any person. Or group of persons. And that is the way. That Jacob. Responds here. For example. See the way.

In which he commands his house. Verse 2. Put away. The strange gods. That are among you. And be clean. And change your garments. Now is this the same.

Jacob we saw. In the previous chapter. He can't even speak. To Shechem. And Hamor. Without his sons. Dictating the whole proceedings. Jacob has lost his place. He's lost his strength.

[25 : 49] He's lost his authority. He's lost his power. He's almost in a sense. Not to such a great degree. But he's almost like. Samson. Shored. It is his sons. Who do the business.

It is his sons. Who tell. What should be done. With the men of Shechem. That they should all be circumcised. It is the sons. Who take vengeance. For themselves. And all Jacob. Jacob can see. At the end of the chapter.

Is that he has been made. To stink. Among the inhabitants. Of the land. But when God. Comes in power. And shows him. His holiness. And calls him. In mercy and grace. Jacob assumes.

Command of the household. Again. He becomes. A man of strength. A man of strength. As though his hair. Has grown. And he has sought. The face of the Lord. In his anguish. And there is a new vigor.

And a new purpose. About the man. As though Jacob knows. Now. What he is about. Now he is in authority. And now he is in control. And when a man is like that.

[26 : 46] When a man is repenting. Before God. And when a man is aware. Of God's holiness. And when he is taken. With that vision. That man becomes strong. That man becomes.

A strong man. And he becomes a man. Of whom people are aware. That the grace of God. Is in him. And the power of God. Is at work in him. And you will notice.

The effect. On Jacob's household. They listen. Immediately. To what he says. Immediately. They respond. They gave Jacob. All the strange gods. Which were in their hand.

And all the earrings. Which were in their ears. Perhaps. A few months previously. They wouldn't have listened. But when the power of God. Is in there.

Then. They listen. Oh what strength. There is. When God. Is working in us all. I'm going to see that with you. Actually. A little. While later on.

[27 : 39] Throughout the sermon. We'll see how. Jacob's life. Is empowered. At this particular point. But notice. How he takes command. Of his own household. And not only. Does he take command of it.

He cleans it. He turns. And he says. Put away. The strange. Gods that are among you. Be clean. And change. Your garments. Be clean.

And be changed. Now. I think the change. Of garments here. Has probably. A two-fold function. First of all. They're going up.

Into the presence of God. Now you'll notice. Whenever people. Appeared. In the presence of God. At certain times. In regular worship. They would.

Appear. In a proper way. And in a proper manner. They would prepare for it. They would prepare. In their hearts. And. The change of garments.

[28 : 37] Was not just. The fact. That they would perhaps. Wear. Certain clothing. When they were in the public assembly. But it also symbolized. Very often symbolizes. The fact. That they were putting on.

The new man. And taking off. The old man. In other words. The change of garments. Speaks of. Taking off. Remember how Paul speaks.

To the Ephesians. He says. Put off. The old man. And the vocabulary there. Reminds us of. Taking off. One set of clothing. And putting on another. Take off the old man. He says.

And put on the new man. Which is fashioned. According to the image. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. And this change of garments. Is like that. There is a relentless purge.

As Jacob examines. His own life. And the life of his household. And he puts out of it. What is offensive to God. And he puts into his life. And into his family.

[29 : 32] What pleases the Lord. Before he goes up. And meets with him. Before he even presents himself. At Bethel. To worship God. He will put his house in order.

He'll put his life in order. And we should always remember. That ourselves. Whenever we gather. The sacred hour of worship. Is on the Lord's day. God still has a day.

Which he has set aside. For the public worship. And for the public assembly. When God's appointed preachers. Will proclaim his own revealed word. To the assembled.

Visible church of God. When he has promised. To be present in that assembly. In a particular way. At the stated hour. On the Lord's day. In the Lord's house.

And that is a time. To prepare. To appear properly. To give it reverence. And to give it respect. And not to seek somehow. To cheapen the thing.

[30 : 28] And there are many ways. In which we can cheapen it. But honor it. Honor it. Honor the presence of God. In our midst. In the outward man.

As well as in the inward man. Some people think. That it doesn't really matter. For example. What you wear. To the house of God. Well. Of course it matters. What you wear. To the house of God. These things are all important.

To the Lord. We all know. That there is a difference. Between what you would call. Casual clothing. And clothes that is more formal. Nobody goes to a wedding. Or anything like that. Dressed in a t-shirt. And jeans.

Nobody does that. Why? Well. Because it's not an occasion for it. It is a formal occasion. The same is true. With the stated assemblies. Of God's house. It's not the same as. Having worship in your house.

This is when the whole church. Convenes. To assemble. Into the presence of God. Then. Wear appropriate clothing. Don't wear casual clothing. Because it's not a casual thing.

[31 : 24] You say to me. God is my father. I say to you. God is also your king. And God is also the king. Of all the earth. And when he gathers this church. He gathers it as a king. As well as a father. And we should make sure.

That we honor him. In the outward. And in the inward man. By giving him what is good. And what is right. And they prepare. For this meeting. But it's remarkable. What Jacob says.

He says. Put away. The strange gods. That are. Among you. Now. You'll notice. That these are not just inward gods. They are outward things. Because Jacob takes them.

And he buries them. In verse 4. Under the oak tree. In Shechem. Now. It may seem strange. That there are. False gods.

In the presence. Of Jacob's house. Now. Let's go. Back. A little bit. To find out. What they are. And where they came from. Rachel took them. She's Jacob's wife.

[32 : 20] She took them. From the house. Of Laban. Her father. Now. Laban used them. They were small. Images. Images. Of what. We're not sure.

Images. Of. Maybe natural things. Or. Gods. Or. Goddesses. Deities. Things that were worshipped. And.

Laban used to consult. These things. Or he used to use them. In his worship. And even when he was. Half converted. And he was never. No more than half converted. If you understand my expression. He was never a man of God.

Laban. But he did adopt. Jehovah. In some form. As his God. Or as one of his gods. And even when he worshipped Jehovah. He would use these images. Now.

Rachel took these images. And I think I referred before. To the fact that they functioned. As title deeds to the property. And Rachel felt that Laban. Had swindled Jacob. For so many years.

[33 : 15] That he deserved. That property himself. And she took away. The title deeds. Now. These. Teraphim. These small idols. Are still.

In the house of Jacob. Ten years. Later. For some reason. Jacob. Hasn't dealt with them. He hasn't either returned them. Or put them out of the house.

Or done anything with them. Until God. Comes to him. Powerfully. And tells him to repent. And then. He commands the household. And he gathers these gods.

And he puts them out. Of the house. Now. The question is. Who was using the things? And I think. From the way it's written.

It appears that some people. Were using them. Now. There were many servants. In Jacob's household. And I'm sure. Many of them. Were not fully converted. To the true God. And father.

[34 : 07] Of our Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe they still used. Those idols. In the general household. Of Jacob. Or maybe. If they worshipped God.

Perhaps they used. These idols. Still to represent God. Now. That's a remarkable thing. Because. It's amazing. How often. That finds its way. Into the Christian church. Making graven images.

Or making representations. Of God. In wood. Or in stone. Or in precious metals. Making representations. Of God himself. That is what the golden calf was.

And that's one of the things. That people forget. The golden calf. Was not a foreign God. It was Jehovah. It was an attempt. To worship Jehovah. By means. Of an image. The kind of image.

That they had seen. In Egypt. They represented. The power of God. As a calf. Giving life. And giving sustenance. I'm sure today. That would seem. A pretty good idea.

[35 : 03] To some people. To make the. Power. Or the reproductive. Or the life giving. Power of God. Into the shape of a calf. Or into the shape of. Something else. Who knows what. But all these things. Are anathema.

To the Lord. He has expressly. Forbidden. Any attempt. To reduce himself. Into an image. point and then you just seem to somehow forget about them or think that they're not there.

But when God comes in power, these things come before you. Things that you had buried in your consciousness, which God once buried out of sight, and they resurrect and they appear.

And Jacob has to get rid of them. Now the earrings appear to be connected with that, because you'll notice that along with the strange gods, they gave them the earrings which were in their ears. Now, earrings began in Sumer, in the most ancient civilization known to man. And I'm going to say a bit about Sumer in a moment, but it seems that they were probably part of this idolatry or that they were somehow connected. Apparently they were worn originally to keep evil spirits out, but that was the function of the earrings in Sumer. And they were connected to these teraphim or to the idols. And in the giving of the idols, they gave the earrings, which possibly had an image of some kind carved on them as well. And so the earrings were cast in along with the idols. Now they originated, as I said, in Sumer. Now, that brings us to something else. Where did these idols come from? Well, they came from Laban south. Where did Laban get them? Well, he took them from Ur of the Chaldees, where Abraham came from in the first place. Now, Ur of the Chaldees is in itself an interesting place. It's one of the oldest, again it is, the oldest civilization known to man. There in Sumer, you have the cities of Babylon. You have the cities of Ur. You have the great plain of Shinar, where Nimrod in Genesis 10 became a mighty king on the earth. And he organized the building of the

Tower of Babel. Now, I'd like in a way to pause and look at that, but I'm not going to. But it would appear that the Tower of Babel was the center of all kinds of false and false religious worship.

[38 : 03] That these towers in Babylon were largely connected with the worship of the stars and the worship of fallen foreign gods. And this great Tower of Babel was organized by Nimrod. And what was it?

Well, it was humanism at its peak. Let us build a tower and let it reach unto heaven. Let its top, as it were, go right up, not into God's heaven, but let it just become so big. Let it become the focal point of our civilization. Let it become the rallying point of the great kingdom that we have built.

Now, you remember after the flood, God had commanded the people to disperse and to form distinct nations. But Nimrod gathered people around himself and he built this tower as the great center of humanistic civilization. And ever since Babylon, or since that time Babylon represents man's enthronement of himself, man's attempt to be God. You remember the vision that Nebuchadnezzar saw of this great statue, part of it, a head of gold, and its chest and arms were silver, and the belly was bronze, and the legs were bronze, and the feet were clay. And that represented, it was in the shape of a man, that represented man's kingdom upon the earth. It's always opposed to God's kingdom upon the earth.

You have the two kingdoms, man establishing his own law, his own way of living. And it's diametrically opposed to God's kingdom established upon the earth. And the one wars against the other.

And Nebuchadnezzar saw this huge vision of a man. And it looked all imposing until the little stone came out of the mountain. And it rolled down the mountain. And it smashed the statue. And it blew away.

[39 : 53] And the stone grew until it became an all-consuming mountain. That is the picture of God's kingdom finally extinguishing the humanistic kingdom of man. And that began in earnest in Nimrod's day in Sumer.

And its heart was in Ur of the Chaldees. That's where the Teraphim came from. And they made all their way into Jacob's family and into the land of Canaan. Do you see the teaching there? The polytheism, the humanism, the pantheism, the worship of sexual immorality. All these things are forever trying to get into the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The worship of images, the worship of mother and child, which you have in Nimrod's own day. All these things coming into the church, continually trying to break down the law of God. Now, when I say that it's continually trying, if you go forward to Joshua chapter 24, you'll notice a remarkable thing.

Now, this is many, many years afterwards. Joshua chapter 24. And verse 1. Now, look at how the scripture gives you clues all the time as to what's going on.

In verse 1, Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem. Now, we're in the same place. This is where Jacob was, and this is where Joshua was gathering the tribes many years afterwards.

And you'll notice what Joshua calls them to do in verse 14. He's calling the tribes to do this. Now, he's about to die himself, and he counsels the people. Verse 14. Fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in truth. He doesn't just say one. He says the two in sincerity and in truth.

[41 : 55] And put away the gods which your fathers... Now, look, he's still telling them after they came out of Egypt, put away the gods which your father served on the other side of the flood. Now, that's a reference to Abraham before he was called out of Ur. The little Teraphim, the gods of Nimrod, which your father served on the other side of the flood and in Egypt. In other words, even this burying of them by Jacob under the tree didn't get rid of these things. They somehow or other found their way back into the very family of Jacob itself and served the Lord. And he says, if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, you choose this day whom you will serve. Whether the gods which your father served on the other side of the flood or the gods of the Amorites, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And notice verse 23. Now therefore put away the strange gods which are among you and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel. Now that tells us that we have to continually put idols out of our heart. We have to continually put idols out of the church. And in one form or another, the gods of Sumer will come in. Hero worship. How many worship heroes? Covetousness. Wealth. Sexual immorality.

You know, they had their little gods and goddesses to present these things. Like the last one I just mentioned there, they had their gods, their goddesses. Was it Venus? Amongst the Sumerians, it was Ashtaroah or Astarte, which represented these things. Little statues to show what they really worshipped.

And what they worshipped was themselves and their own fleshly inclinations. And all the time, the devil wants to bring us down to that. Now he never does it openly. He just says, here, this is just a little thing and it's all right. Just give it a little place and it's all right. And then he'll move on a little bit more and he says, well, you've got this, so now get that. And that is how the images stayed in. And you know how they came into the Christian church in the early centuries of the church.

And in many parts, they've never been put out the very worship of images. Put out idols. And it's the Lord not telling yourselves to do that very thing, to get idols out of our own lives. Now finally, and very briefly, you'll notice that God blesses this repentance. Now this is a remarkable thing.

Notice how this is put here. Back in Genesis 35, verse 4, we're told that they gave to Jacob all the strange gods and all their earrings, and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem. Verse 5, and they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.

[45 : 05] Now, there's a marvelous truth brought out here. Here you have Jacob and his sons traveling through Canaan, and nobody will put a hand on them.

In spite of the fact that most of the communities now hate them, they won't put a hand on them. Before the repentance, Jacob is saying, you made me to stink, he says, and the people will gather against me, and I will be destroyed.

But after the repentance, he walks strongly like that, and no one puts a finger on him. What is the teaching? Well, the teaching in there is just this.

When we are weak, and when we let down the cause, we live in fear, and we live in trembling. But when we turn to the Lord, and take a step in faith, then it is those from the outside who live in the fear, and in the trembling.

Because when the church is repentant, and when your soul is repentant, you become terrible as an army with banners. And when the presence of God is in you, and it's living in you, the world knows it.

[46 : 14] And when he has forsaken you, the world knows that as well. The world knows that as well. And Jacob well knew when to be afraid, and he well knew when to be strong.

And he just walks like that, in the way that they walk through the Red Sea, and everybody just stands back, because the power and might of the Lord God is upon him.

Oh, my friend, are you afraid of the world outside? Or is the world outside more afraid of you? Would it not be a good thing if the power of God was so clear in our lives, that the terror of God would be upon the cities, and they would not pursue after the sons of Jacob?

That's the change repentance made in this man, and in his life. And the last thing is this, that when he went to Bethel, God appeared to him there, and he appeared to him with special promises, and he renewed the covenant with him.

Ah, how many feelings Jacob had when he stood in that place, when he saw the stone that he had erected there, 30 years before, how he must have wept when he remembered leaving the household of his parents, when he had nothing at all, but God helped him with a vision.

[47 : 30] God gave him strength, and God gave him grace. Sometimes you feel like that, you know, you go to a place, or to a situation, and you remember how God dealt with you there before, and you're overcome by it.

And there, God suddenly appears to him, and he reveals himself to him, and Jacob has fellowship with him. And this is the kind of fellowship that Jacob hasn't had for some time.

He has it now. The gods are out, and in comes Jehovah, and he builds an altar, and what does he call it? The God of Bethel. Remember last week I said that in Shechem, he built an altar, and he called it the God of Israel.

And I sometimes wonder if he was glorying in what had happened to himself, rather than in the one who made it happen. You are a prince with God, and with men. He doesn't call this altar the God of Israel at all.

He calls it the God of Bethel, the God who helped me in my weakness, the God who sustained me. This is a strong man. This is a man filled with the Spirit of God.

[48 : 34] He can only glory in his own weakness, and in the power of God, the God of Bethel, who helped me and had mercy upon him.

May we all know him and know him better. May he bless his word. Let us pray. O Lord, give us grace to lay hold upon the gospel, to recognize that there is plenteous redemption to all who fear thee.

O help us to turn towards thee, to see that Christ is more willing to forgive than we are to ask ourselves. Give us grace to turn. For Christ's sake.

Amen.