

27.4 The God of the House

In **Genesis 35:1-8**, God sent Jacob to Bethel. It is here that God changed his name from Jacob to Israel. He was to inherit the land God had given to his grandfather, Abraham and his father, Isaac (see **Genesis 35:9-12**). The land would become the “Land of Israel.”

I want us to notice the statement that is made in **Genesis 35:7** (ESV):

7 and there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother.

When Jacob came to this place he worshiped God. There he built an altar. He named the place, “*Beth-el*.” We would run it together and just say “*Bethel*,” but in Hebrew it is more distinctive. It means “*House of God*.”

The final two letters of Beth-el are a shortened form of the Hebrew word for God. Jacob’s new name would also contain this abbreviated name for God and would mean “*Strives with God*.” It comes from his wrestling match with God in **Genesis 32**. It could mean strive against or strive with God against others. The word, Beth or “Bayit” [by-ite] means, “House.”

For many of us, just being at the “House of God,” would have been enough. This is not the case for Jacob turned Israel. He looked behind the place, the House of God (Beth-el) to the God who established it. The reason he was where he was in his life was because of his God, not his shepherd skills or deceptive accomplishments, it was God. So, he could look beyond the physical.

He now calls this place, **El-bethel**. That is, “God of the House of God.” It’s not just about the physical place, it’s about the God of that place.

I think there is a point to be made here. Too often we forget the God who is behind all things. We tend to focus on the “Beth-el,” the “house of God,” rather on God. Let’s consider some examples.

Sometimes we actually forget about God and worship our worship instead of the God of our worship. We get caught up in personal preferences and worship wars and traditions so that we neglect the real point of worship. I have said many times in sermons, “*If the heart is right the worship style is unimportant. If the heart is not right, the worship style is unimportant.*” When our hearts are right, God accepts our worship and our preferences don’t matter that much. When our hearts are not right, God does not accept our worship and our preferences make no difference.

We can indeed develop “Five Acts of Worship.” We can make sure we sing on key with only the skilled ones leading us. We can focus on the Lord’s Supper that it becomes the primary sacrament of the service. It becomes the only “necessary part.” I am free to leave the service if I have just eaten a chip of an unleavened cracker and sipped a bit of grape juice.

We can relegate worship to entertainment. Certainly heart-felt qualities in worship encourage our hearts. Bad music, bad attitudes, or bad theology in worship can keep us from worshipping. We wind up just going through the motions. So, we try to inject loud music, fog machines, movies, etc. in order to create an atmosphere similar to a rock concert or a political rally. That makes the focus on us and not the God whom we are to worship.

Sometime, somehow, some way, we need to get back to the God behind the worship service. Worship is not ritual. Worship is not entertainment. Worship, or “worth-ship” from older English, involves expressing God’s worth to us with humble and sincere hearts. That is the idea behind **John 4:24** (ESV):

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

It's not so much about place as it is spirit and truth. We can easily get out of balance with either of these. We can be so determined with truth that we kill our spirits. We can be so bound to have the right atmosphere and spirit that we destroy truth in the process.

Let's do one more. Where do you put your faith or trust regarding your salvation? Some focus on a "formula" for salvation. Others focus on the Savior of our salvation. When we focus on the formula, we make our salvation dependent on how well we work the formula. If we focus on the Savior's work we realize as the song says, "He paid a debt He did not owe" because "I owe a debt I cannot pay." This is the magnificent love of God in action. This is the work of the Savior behind our responsive actions to Him.

Salvation IS by grace through faith (or trust). We can read this in **Ephesians 2**. I think the emphasis on how much we trust the Savior. It is not on my own perfection. Otherwise it becomes of works wherein we boast.

Consider this translation of **John 3:16** in the Amplified Bible, Classic Edition:

For God so greatly loved and dearly prized the world that He [even] gave up His only begotten (unique) Son, so that whoever believes in (trusts in, clings to, relies on) Him shall not perish (come to destruction, be lost) but have eternal (everlasting) life.

Faith is not merely intellectual understanding. It is a reliance on God. Faith TRUSTS God to do what we cannot do on our own.

Martin Luther once illustrated this by standing in a dark basement. He called to his son in the upper doorway to jump to him. His son could not see his father in the shadows, but jumped because he trusted (or had faith in) him. There is a lot beyond our comprehension. The question is, do we trust God anyway or do we merely trust our own abilities?

Most of us would agree that we do very little perfectly. Have you ever changed your understanding of something in the Bible? You didn't understand it or do it 100% correctly and when you learned more, you made changes to be more in line with God, who is always correct.

The key is lifting Jesus, not methods or men. When we lift Him up instead of ourselves, amazing things happen. **John 12:32** (KJV) reads:

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

My prayer for America is that we would once again look for and to the God behind the house of God. That we would, as our Founders and Framers, TRUST Him to save and guide us.

Jesus came to show us that we could trust HIM, even when we do not understand or get it right 100% of the time. He came to show us that He is worthy of our heart-felt, truth-based worship. We must keep our eyes on Him, not our traditions or our formulas.

Keep The Light of Trust in God Burning!