

GENERAL SUBJECT: BETHEL—THE HOUSE OF GOD

Message Three - Part 2

The God of Bethel

Scripture Reading: Gen. 33:17-20; 35:1, 6-7, 9-12

Monday

Eph. 3:17-21 – Footnotes 21¹, 21²

II. In Genesis 35 there is a crucial and radical turn from the individual experience of God to the corporate experience of God—the experience of God as the God of Bethel—Eph. 3:17-21; 4:4-6

This point mentions some verses in Ephesians. I suggest that you read Ephesians, and in each chapter you will see that the experience we have of the Triune God is within the Body of Christ. Ephesians introduces us into the Body of Christ, and it has as a goal the Body of Christ. In Ephesians 1, for example, we are told that the Father chose us; this is the Father's plan (Eph 1:3-5). Then in verses 6 and 7, it says that in the beloved, in Christ, we have received redemption, the forgiveness of sins. And in verses 13 and 14, we experience the Spirit as the seal and the pledge. So, in these verses we have the Father, the Son and the Spirit, the Triune God. What is the result in verses 22 and 23? The church, the Body of Christ. You can go through the whole book of Ephesians and you will see that all the experiences of the Triune God always have as a result the Body of Christ.

Tuesday

Gen. 35:7 – Footnotes 7¹, 7²

A. In Genesis 35:7 we have a new divine title—El-bethel, God of the house of God.

As individuals, we can experience the God of Abraham, which is the God of justification. We can also experience the God of Isaac, who is the God of grace. But it is only at Bethel that we can experience El-bethel. And the Father's house is where God is satisfied, where He is happy, where He has His rest, where His will is carried out. Some will say, "Well, God is omnipresent; God is everywhere; God is in Jupiter." Yes, God is omnipresent, but in His economy God is localized in His house. Where do we find God? In His house. It is in the house of God where we meet the God of the house of God. And here in our experience, we come to know a different God. Our reading of the Bible is different, our prayer is different, and our service is different. Why? Because now I am in the Body and I am for the Body. This makes all the difference.

B. Before this chapter God was the God of individuals; here He is no longer just the God of individuals but is El-bethel, the God of a corporate body, the God of the house of God.

In Genesis 28, when you read there, God appeared to Jacob as the God of individuals. He said, "I am... the God of Abraham... and the God of Isaac" (v.13). Then Jacob said, "Look, God, if You take care of me, if You keep me, if You protect me that they would not kill me, then You will be my God" (v. 21) and I'll give you ten percent of this enterprise." "You will be my God", this is what Jacob told him, "and I will give You ten percent" (v. 22). Does this not sound familiar? Have you not made this deal with God? "Lord, if You take me out of this situation, then I will worship You. If You take me out of this financial problem, Lord, you will be my God; oh please God! If You protect me, You will be my God. If You will heal me, You will be My God. If You give me a lot of money, I will give you the tithe." Me, me, me and me—all this kind of prayer is centered on the self. We entered into the church life, and we must recognize that we have seen something. But to be honest, our coming into the church life was very centered in ourselves. I liked the doctrine; I liked the sisters' food. Here they take care of me, and there is always a love feast. They invite me to their homes. How awesome! There is no such place like this on the earth! Everything is centered on myself. But if you remain in the church life in this way, we're all a time bomb, and it is a matter of time when we are going to explode. If you remain in the church life centered on yourself, you will not remain in the church life; or if you do, you will become a big problem for the rest.

Why do many people leave the life of the church? It is not because of the doctrine. It's not because of the practices. There are two reasons, there may be many more but, (1) ambition—wanting to be someone. The "I" wants to stand out and excel; this is ambition. (2) Offenses that we have not forgiven. Look, if you only come here on Sunday, and you just come in for one or two hours, nobody is going to offend you and you will not be offended by anyone. But if you are in the church life, and you travel in a van for 10 hours with 15 saints, and if you are in the church life surrounded by a lot of people, all the time, there will be offenses. But the "I" never forgives because the "I" is always right. The self never gives up to allow someone else to win. This will cause you to explode and fly out of the church life. We truly need the Lord's mercy and grace to save us from our individualism. May the Lord save us from our independence, and may the Lord save us from our false spirituality, so that we may truly enter into Bethel, into the reality of the Body of Christ. That we would not remain in the church life merely in an external way, but in an intrinsic way. And in this way we could be built up with each other. This is the dimension of El-bethel. This is the dimension of the God of the house of God. This is the God of a corporate entity, where we are simply members, and we are members one of another.

Wednesday

1 Cor. 12:12 – Footnote 12²

- C. Bethel signifies the corporate life, which is the Body of Christ; thus, in calling God the God of Bethel, Jacob advanced from the individual experience to the corporate experience—1 Cor. 12:12

First Corinthians 12:12 and 13 tell us about the corporate Christ and that we were baptized into one Body and Spirit. That is, not only do we bury the old life, but we enter into the life of the Body. And in Romans 12:5, it tells us that we are “members ... of one another.” It’s not that I’m a member and you’re a member, and we see each other from afar. No! We are members one of another. If a member suffers, all members suffer with it, or if one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it (1 Cor. 12:26). Once I saw a friend and I went to say hello, and as I stretched out my hand to shake his hand, I had not realized that his dog was chained up, and when I went to shake his hand, his dog thought I was attacking him. Then the dog came onto me, and stuck his canine tooth into my finger, and I still have the mark here. Do not think that I was just there pondering about the situation: “Oh, that’s interesting, the dog, the finger, the canine tooth, and how will the finger feel about this?” Once I got bitten, I gave a scream and pulled the dog away, and afterwards I had to get a rabies shot. The bite was only on the finger, but it affected the whole body, so I had to suffer from a bite that not only affected my finger, but it also affected the whole body. In other words, we all have an effect on the Body. Don’t think that you do not affect the Body; you affect the church, you affect the churches, you affect all the churches. You have an effect on the church either as a factor of damage and contamination, or as a building factor, because we are members of one another.

Jacob’s advance here is from individual to corporate.

1. The altar Jacob built at Shechem was called El-Elohe-Israel, by the name of God as related to an individual—Gen. 33:17-20.
2. The altar Jacob built at Bethel was called El-bethel, the name of God as related to a corporate body—35:6-7.
3. The altar at Shechem is an individual altar, but the altar at Bethel is a corporate altar—the altar for the house of God.

The building up of an altar refers to consecration. What understanding do we have when we build an altar in Bethel? What is our understanding when we build an altar to El-bethel? This means that I have touched the reality of the Body of Christ, and now I consecrate all that I am, all that I have, all my person, all my things, and all my affairs for the Body of Christ, for the house of God. It is a personal consecration but the goal is corporate. The goal is the building up of the Body of Christ. That is the goal; that is the objective.

Around 2012-2013 I was working on the Life-Study of Ezekiel, and there was a portion there that was very moving and that really affected me. And this was confirmed in 2017 in the Crystallization of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 43, God instructs Ezekiel to describe the house to the people of Israel, so that they would be measured by the house of God, and would feel humiliated because of their iniquities. Let me read these verses Ezekiel 43:10-11: “You, O son of man, describe the house to the house of Israel, ...” very interesting, “that they may feel humiliated because of their iniquities, and let them measure the pattern. And if they feel humiliated because of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the house, its arrangement, its exits, its entrances, its whole design and all its statutes—indeed its whole design and all its laws, and write them down in their sight, that they may keep its whole design and all its statutes, and do them.”

Thursday

1 Cor. 12:13 – Footnotes 13¹, 13²

Here we are told about being measured by the house of God, by the Body of Christ. Normally there are two criteria, or two standards, by which we are governed; we even use these to evaluate our relationship with the Lord. These allow us to see our shortcomings and our needs. The first standard is the moral law —the Ten Commandments; you shall not steal; you shall not lie; you shall not covet; you shall not kill; etc. So there is no lust, there is no murder, there is no anger, and there is no greed. All that is in the realm of morality and we need to comply with this law. When we do not fulfill this law we are accused, and we are condemned by God Himself, by the law itself. We have to repent, humble ourselves, and confess to return to God so that our conscience may be at peace. This is the first standard, the moral laws.

The second standard is the Spiritual principles. Do we have our morning revival? Do we read the Bible? Do we pray? Do we serve? All these are spiritual principles. If we do not reach this standard, we repent, we confess, we return to the word, we pray, we wake up in the morning to have a time with the Lord. All these are spiritual principles.

But there is another angle, there is another realm, there is another dimension. And this third criterion, this third standard, is the house of God. It is God's building; it is the Body of Christ. In other words, we have to enter and see that there is another standard; there is another criterion. There is another evaluation, which is not what is moral, it is not what is spiritual, but it is the house of God; it is Bethel; it is the Body of Christ. My being, my living, my behaviour, my work, does it conform to the Body of Christ? Does it build the Body of Christ? Does it fit into the Body of Christ? This is another dimension; it is another sphere. Do I honour the Body? Do I know the Body? This is another dimension. Do I seek the fellowship? Do I keep the oneness? This is not in the sphere of morality, nor in the matter of spiritual principles. This is in the sphere of the Body of Christ. This is Bethel, and this is to know the God of Bethel. That is, to know the God of the house of God. God told Ezekiel, "Show them the house ... let them be measured by the house." That's why I say that this is another dimension. Once we begin to see this, there is all kinds of repentance because we realize that we do not reach the stature. We do not fit in the Body. We do not keep the oneness of the Body. We do not honour the Body, but what a mercy, that God wants to be to us El-Bethel! He wants to be to us the God of the house of God. He wants us to enter into this corporate experience of the Triune God. May the Lord shepherd us to enter into this reality.

Friday

Psa. 23:5-6 – Footnotes 5¹, 6¹

I would like to mention eight aspects of the effect that this has upon us, eight results of having been measured by the house of God.

- (1) To be humiliated and reduced to nothing—that is, everything I say and everything I do, that does not fit and does not build the Body of Christ, is worthless.
- (2) To be dethroned, in order that the “I” stops ruling as it says in Hymn 846, stanza 5:
“My trust in self o’erthrow,
Down from self’s throne I’ll go.”

In other words, we lose our confidence in ourselves.

- (3) To know ourselves, what we are and what we do, in relation to the Body of Christ—In other words, we are no longer measured by the moral law, or by spiritual principles, but by the principles of the Body.
- (4) To have a deep and thorough repentance that comes from a change in our way of thinking. Before we were not conscious of the Body but now we are conscious of the Body, so we repent and we enter into a glorious freedom. There is really a glorious freedom!
- (5) To be freed from the self—especially of being conscious of the self, and our own identity. Now we are conscious, not of ourselves, but we are conscious of the church, we are conscious of the churches, we are conscious of the Body of Christ, we are conscious of the house of God. If a member suffers, all members suffer with it, or one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it.
- (6) To be conscious of the Body, and to know the desire that God has for the building. In other words, little by little, the desire for God’s good pleasure, for His Body, begins to burn in us; so within us the longing that God could obtain the Body begins to burn in us, that He would obtain the Bride, the warrior.
- (7) To understand that spirituality is a matter of the Body, and to be motivated to grow in life toward maturity, with the view of the building of God. So, now, we pray in the Body and for the Body. We read the Bible in the Body, and for the Body.
- (8) Our function is normalized, by keeping the principles of the Body.

What are these principles? The fellowship of the Body, the oneness of the Body, to be members in the Body, the limitation of the Body, and the supply of the Body. All of these follow the pattern in Psalm 23. The Lord is shepherding us little by little. We enjoy the green pastures; we drink the refreshing water; we go through the path of righteousness, and our soul is restored. But what is the goal? To dwell in the house of God all the days of our life! The goal is Bethel. The goal is the house of God. The goal is the Body of Christ, to live in the reality of the Body of Christ to build up the Body of Christ.

Saturday

Gen. 35:11 – Footnote 11¹

D. The all-sufficient God is revealed for the building of Bethel; only at Bethel is it possible for us to realize the all-sufficiency of our God—Gen. 35:11a

In Genesis 35:11, God said, “...I am the All-sufficient God ...” At Bethel, we know El-bethel, and the El-bethel is the El Shaddai—the All-Sufficient God. As we are no longer individuals, but are members of the House of God, we can now receive the immeasurable supply of God, in the Body and for the Body. This is a monumental change. Now the Lord, as the Head, can remove all limitations of His supply because previously those limitations protected us and protected the Body. This limitation of His supply was there for what? To protect us and the Body. So God removes the limitation of His supply because that limitation was actually for our protection and for the protection of the Body; but now we are in Bethel. All the supply to you as a member is for the house, so God has no problem supplying you. All limitation is removed because you will not become a problem; all the supply to you is for the house. Praise the Lord! God supplies us in the house and for the house! This is El-bethel.

1. The purpose of God’s revealing Himself as the All-sufficient One is for His building; the all-sufficient God is for God’s building.
2. We cannot experience the All-sufficient God in an individualistic way; in order to experience the all-sufficient God, we must be in Bethel, in the church life.

There are certain aspects that are reserved just for the house. There are certain things that are only reserved for those who are in the house. Here to know the All-sufficient God is only possible in Bethel, because now He can dispense Himself into us, and all that benefit is for the Body of Christ.

3. God’s all-sufficiency requires the Body; we need the house, the building, in order to experience this aspect of Him—Phil. 1:19.

In Philippians 1:19, Paul was in prison and he said that this would turn out to his salvation through the petition of the saints and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. “For I know that for me this will turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” What was it that preserved Brother Watchman Nee while he was in jail for all those years? It was this kind of experience from Philippians 1:19. The All-sufficient God was the one who enabled Brother Watchman Nee to stay all those 20 years in prison. He did not have a Bible; he did not have a hymnal; he did not have the church or the rest of the saints; he was cut off from all communication. There is a brother who is in the church life where I am who was a cellmate of Brother Watchman Nee. There came a point where Watchman Nee told this brother, “When you go out, go to Witness Lee. When you see him, you will see me.” Watchman Nee was cut off from everything physical that had to do with the Body of Christ, but he was in the Body of Christ. He was receiving the supply of the All-sufficient God in the Body, because this is a reality that has no physical limitations. When he was there in prison, he could receive the supply of the Body and he could release the supply for the Body. This is a reality because there is a mutual supply. In the Body we receive the supply and the supply we receive is for the Body. This was the same experience that Paul wrote about in Philippians when he was in prison. He prayed that this would be his salvation, that it would turn out to salvation, but it was not he alone praying; it was the petition of the saints, and it was the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. So, it is the petition of the Body that releases the supply. And by being in the Body, we receive the supply of the Body and we release this supply into the Body. May the Lord shepherd us so that we may enter into the reality of Bethel and we may know El-bethel, the God of the house of God.