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Revival At Shechem

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The life of Jacob parallels that of many Christians today. He lived up to his name, which means "Supplanter." He was always trying to drive a bargain, even with the Almighty. He stole his brother's birthright and his father's blessing. Far from home, he slept on his hardest pillow and dreamed his greatest dream. Stone pillows and spiritual perception, rocks and revelation, seem to go together. He set up the stone for a memorial; the pillow became a pillar. He called the place Bethel, and the rest of his life revolved around it.

But, still looking for bargains, he left the place of blessing and moved to wicked Shechem because he saw a chance of getting rich. It is Lot moving to Sodom all over again, and it never pays. It costs too much to live at Shechem. Jacob paid dearly. His daughter Dinah "went out to see the daughters of the land," made her debut into the corrupt society around her, lost her virtue, and plunged the family into disgrace. How often today Christian parents never take moral and spiritual dangers into consideration when they decide where to live!

RETURN TO BETHEL

After this disaster, God called on Jacob to return to Bethel. Jacob said to his household: "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 was with me in the way which I went" (Gen. 34, 35). Observe that he proposed both negative and positive action: "Put away the strange gods, be clean, change your garments, and go up to Bethel." It reminds us of the New Testament injunction: "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14). His household obeyed. Jacob buried all their strange gods under the oak by Shechem. Then they returned to Bethel, and Jacob renamed it El-beth-el, for God had become more important than the place.

Have you ever compared this revival at Shechem with the one Joshua tried to bring about at Shechem much later? In his very last days Joshua assembled Israel, gave them a refresher course in how good God had been to them, then called on them to renounce idols and serve the Lord. They glibly responded with vows of dedication, but Joshua must have suspected their superficiality when he said, "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15). There was another show of revival at Bochim when the people wept but did nothing about it. The cheapness of their response shows up in the next generation which forsook God and served idols.

Too many modern revivals are patterned after Joshua's meeting at Shechem, instead of Jacob's. The difference is not hard to find. Jacob's household did

something about their idols. They did not cover their sins—they confessed and forsook them; all who do that shall prosper (Prov. 28:13). Today we fear the Lord and serve our own gods. We try to serve two masters. We break the first commandment, and live as though the temple of God had agreement with idols. We set up strange altars in our hearts and homes, as Jezebel did in Israel. We throw open the door of church membership to pagans, and never say, "Leave your false gods as you enter." That is the way Constantine filled the churches in his day, and instead of Christianizing paganism he paganized Christianity. No wonder John concludes his epistle by saying, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

NO HALFWAY MEASURES WLL DO

There are many so-called "revivals" today, but we do not renounce our idols. We promise allegiance to God, as did Joshua's congregation; we even weep as they did at Bochim, but we keep one hand behind our backs. How many times have I seen church-members vow allegiance to God on Sunday, and never show up at church the rest of the week they had pledged to God. There will never be real revival until our idols are buried. At Ephesus there was a bonfire of evil literature when the power of God struck the place. If church members had such a book-burning today, it would take all the deserts of the West to hold the conflagration. Would to God that along with atomic tests there might be such a voluntary burning!

We have no business expecting the heathen in Africa to renounce their idols if we insist on keeping ours. With some, it is the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4); with others, it is pleasure (2 Tim. 3:4); it may be the love of money (1 Tim. 6:10); there are those "whose god is their belly" (Phil. 3:19) or even their loved ones (Matt. 10:37). And there is that last god to go—the idol of those who are lovers of their own selves (2 Tim. 3:2). The Macedonians first gave themselves, but we make that our last offering.

Joshua met the shallow dedication of his day by saying, "Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good" (Josh. 24: 19, 20). A lot of cheap consecrations nowadays ought to be met with a sermon from that text. We cannot play with a holy and jealous God. We trifle with marriage vows and all other moral commitments these days. Along with that goes the assumption that we can lightly regard our promises to Christ and His church.

If we are going up to Bethel to worship the true

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