

# In the Beginning, God...

## Introduction

Locations seem to be important within the biblical narrative of redemption. Geography is important to the Lord. It is as if, no detail no matter how small, is insignificant regarding redemption and God's involvement with humanity.

Over the next couple of weeks we will look at the various geographic locations mentioned in the story of redemption and the significance these places play in the unfolding drama of human redemption.

Abraham and Jacob now Israel will arrive and return to these places through the biblical narrative, expressing their commitment to the Lord and to His will regarding their lives.

And they will figure heavily in the messianic story of Jesus and His life on this earth.

Shechem

Bethel

Migdal Eder

Bethlehem

Nazareth

Shiloh

Jericho

Jerusalem

*Map*

**1**



***Jordan Valley  
Relief Map***

Tonight we will look at Shechem and Bethel:

**Message:**

Paul tells us that the things which happened in the Old Testament have been written for our admonition and instruction. (1 Cor. 10:11)

The events and the places seem to bear significance to the Apostles and to the early church. We should take note and learn what God might teach us from His Word.

Genesis 12:5–8 (ESV) 5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, 6 Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

8 From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord.

Genesis 33:18–20 (ESV) 18 And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram, and he camped before the city. 19 And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem’s father, he bought for a hundred pieces of money the piece of land on which he had pitched his tent. 20 There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.

Genesis 35:1–4 (ESV) 1 God said to Jacob, “Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.”

2 So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments.

3 Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.”

4 So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem.

### **Shechem:**

Representative of taking spiritual ground in the believer’s life. The Hebrew word, literally means shoulder or back and symbolizes the taking up of a burden.

It is here that Joshua as an old man, calls Israel to gather and calls them to put away foreign gods, to renew the covenant of faithfulness with God. And he reminds them of God’s faithfulness to them.

Joshua 24:1 (ESV) 1 Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God.

Shechem is located between Mt. Ebal (to the north) where the curses for violating the law were read, and

Gerizim (to the south) where the blessings for keeping the law were read.

The burden of covenant living is necessary for a people to be holy. Paul tells us that we have a debt to grace and it is part of the burden of the Lord.

When Jesus called people to Himself, He told them *take my yoke and my yoke is easy, my burden is light.*

When we come to Christ, there is a burden of faith that must be borne and a yoke of obedience that must be fitted to our lives. It is by God's grace that we are able to enter into the covenant of redemption and both Abraham and Jacob show us the way.

The entry into covenant is an entry into the place that shouldered the burden of salvation.

Both Abraham and Jacob come to this place and both erect an altar and in that place they claim ground that has been promised by God long before they have arrived.

How true that is for the believer too. We come to that place where we will enter into the One who shouldered and carries upon His back the both the burden and the wounds of our debt.

We have no standing there, just as Abraham or Jacob had no standing within the confines of Canaan. The only standing they had and the only standing we have is the promised covenant, this land shall be yours and your offspring after you. Our standing is in Christ alone and the promise the Father made through Him.

Abraham had left all he knew and by faith in a promise made to him by the living God, he came to Shechem and there he erected an altar and worshipped God.

Jacob encounters the same God, and he obeys the command to return to the land promised to his father and his grandfather. So by faith Jacob returns and it is at Shechem that he too erects an altar, worships God and calls upon His name.

It is also here that he purchases land, commands his household to rid themselves of foreign gods, and he reestablishes his allegiance to the God who has been faithful to him.

Speaking of God's promises to Israel, Paul said, Romans 11:29 (ESV) 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

This was to be the land God had given to His people, the same is true for you and me, no matter how far we may have strayed from God's appointed purpose, His promise of eternal redemption are without fail.

We may pay a heavy price in the return but God will honor His promise to us as His children. And Israel must pay for land that is already his, by convenient promise,

This time however, Israel calls the place, *El-Elohe-Israel* God the God of Israel. He is laying claim to ground that was promised, is rightfully his and will be his descendants.

When we come to Christ, we must lay the foundation to claim the ground of our households, our families and we must claim what God has promised to us by faith, because His promises are irrevocable.

### **Bethel:**

While Shechem represents the entry into our spiritual journey with Christ, Bethel represents our growing in faith. It is the place where we become intimately familiar with God and He establishes our identity in Him.

It is where faith and obedience join in holy communion with God. Both men encountered God at Bethel, both men will call on the name of the Lord at Bethel.

For Jacob, Bethel will signify an dramatic change. It is at Bethel that God will give to him the name of Israel. About 30 miles south just after he had worshipped the Lord in Bethel, in a small community known as Hebron, God will also change the name of Abram to Abraham.

The event of the name change is a parallel to our Christian walk. When we come to Christ, we are made righteous by the blood of Christ, but it is a difficult thing to live righteously. Thus God leads us from Shechem our point of salvation to Bethel, and the reality of living life for God.

Once we have completed our journey of sanctification, He gives to us a new name, that reveals the person we were to be all along.

These physical points in both men's lives paint a clear picture of how God leads us deeper into fellowship with

Him, but only if we by faith continue the journey He has appointed for all who believe.

## **Conclusion**

Abraham left Ur by faith.

Jacob returned from exile by faith.

Both men walked into places they did not yet possess because they believed the promise of God more than what they could see with their eyes.

And that is exactly what you and I are called to do.

Some of you tonight are standing spiritually at Shechem.

You know God has called you to claim ground in your family.

In your marriage.

In your prayer life.

In your holiness.

In your obedience.

But you cannot stay there forever.

God says, “Arise, go up to Bethel.”

Go deeper.

Lay aside the idols.

Bury the compromises.

Carry the burden of covenant faithfulness.

Walk with Me until your identity is no longer shaped by who you were... but by who I have called you to become.

Because the goal of redemption is not merely that we escape judgment...

...it is that we become a people who truly know God.

And the same God who met Abraham at Shechem...  
the same God who transformed Jacob at Bethel...  
is still calling His people to walk with Him tonight.