

## Bethel October 9, 2011

### 1. Background

Bethel means “House of God” and “was a border city described in the Hebrew Bible as being located between Benjamin and Ephraim. Eusebius of Caesarea and Jerome describe it in their time as a small village that lay 12 Roman miles north of Jerusalem, to the right or east of the road leading to Neapolis.” Bethel is best known as the site where Jacob falls asleep and dreams of a ladder or stairway going up to heaven, but later in the story God calls Jacob to return to Bethel and while he is there Jacob’s name is changed to Israel. Bethel shows up again in 1 Kings with King Jeroboam, but basically disappears from the biblical narrative.

Quotation from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethel> - accessed Oct 7, 2011

### 2. Exploring the Text

Genesis 28:10-22

- Jacob has a dream when he stops to rest for the night. In Biblical times, dreams were a means through which divine encounters took place. How do we encounter the divine today?
- God once again promises that the descendants of Jacob who are the descendants of Abraham will be numerous, but at this point they are still a fairly small tribe. How do you keep faith in a promise when the promised results are slow in coming?
- Bethel is a sacred place for Jacob that is marked by the stone. What is a sacred place in your life and what marks it as sacred?

Genesis 35:1-15

- God sends Jacob and his family back to Bethel. Before they go, they gather up all the stuff from other gods and faiths and leave it behind. If God asked us to make a similar journey today, what sorts of things would we need to leave behind?
- Why do you think God keeps reaffirming the promise to Jacob and his family?

1 Kings 12:25-33

- King Jeroboam creates a temple at Bethel and at Dan for the people to worship other gods as a way of distracting the people from faith in God in an attempt to preserve his own power. What temples and distractions draw us away from God today?

