

conquest.—Jud. i. 22–25. Bethel is situated about ten miles north from Jerusalem, and less than one mile east from the eastern branch of the great central road running north through the country from Jerusalem. Shechem, Shiloh, Bethel and Jerusalem, lie nearly in a straight line north and south, and we come near the truth in saying that they are respectively ten miles apart.

Bethel is a very ancient city, and it has experienced great vicissitudes in its time. In the days of Samuel it was a flourishing and populous city.—Owing to the sin of Jeroboam, wherewith he made Israel to sin, it was struck down as by an invisible hand and speedily sunk into desolation. It was rebuilt and fortified in the time of the Maccabees; but it is not once mentioned in the New Testament. It rose again into importance in the early ages of the Christian Church, and for a time it acquired considerable distinction. Large Churches and other substantial edifices were built all around. Again it dwindled away; and now nothing remains but a small hamlet, barely discernible in the midst of extensive ruins, marking the site and bearing the once celebrated name of Bethel,—now changed by the Arabs, like the place itself, into Beitin. The city stood on high table-land, but being surrounded with hills of greater elevation the prospect from Bethel was much circumscribed. A large wady comes up from the south-east, and, opening cut into two branches, it embraces the hill in which the city stood. The ruins occupy the whole surface of the hill-point, sloping towards the south-east, and cover a space of three or four acres, although the remains of dilapidated buildings appear at a greater distance all round.

In considering the more remarkable incidents in the history of Bethel the origin of the name claims our first attention,—the celebrated vision of Jacob's ladder. Great trouble has sprung up in Isaac's family, in which Jacob had a guilty hand. On this account he was constrained to leave his father's house, and seek for a time an asylum with a far-distant relation. He sets out and proceeds on his journey a lonely and cheerless traveller, with his heart full of care; and just as the shadows of the evening began to overspread the earth "he lighted on a certain place," and there he resolves to spend the night. He selects a stone for his pillow and lies down to sleep.—His thoughts are greatly troubled, and a load of cares lies heavy on his bosom; but his body is wearied with his journey, and presently he falls fast asleep. He dreams; and in that dream the gracious economy of God towards him in particular, and towards all the heirs of life in general, is symbolically unveiled before his eyes.—Gen. xxviii. He sees a ladder extended from earth to heaven, the angels of God passing up and down upon it, and God himself standing above all; and he hears the voice of the Almighty speaking to him in these cheering and consolatory words. "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed. And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth; and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whether thou goest, and will bring thee again into the land; for I will not leave thee until I have done what I have spoken to thee of." Jacob lay down to sleep uneasy in his conscience, smarting under the rebukes of divine Providence, and doubtless dreading God's sore displeasure; but such a manifestation of God's sovereign love and paternal care effectually composed his troubled spirit, and dissipated at once all fears of desertion. Jacob awoke, deeply awed, indeed, at this glorious man-