

## Renewed Genesis 35:1-15

April 21, 2024

Last Sunday we found Jacob, his family, and large herds of livestock were finally on the road to Canaan. One focal point of the lesson was not only the travel or being chased down by Laban but Jacob's preparations for the inevitable face-to-face confrontation between he and brother Esau. Another focal point within this journey was Jacob's all night wrestling match on the banks of the Jabbok River.

Today God directs Jacob to settle in Bethel and build an altar there. It appears Jacob is growing closer to God as he instructs his family to get rid of any idols, purify themselves, and change clothes for their preparation for going to Bethel. As a kid many years ago, I received similar instructions. In fact, I recall saying something very similar only 40 or so years ago to my kids. We should apply Jacob's message to his family to our Sunday morning routine: You are going to Church, make yourself ready to worship. This journey to Bethel is also when God appeared to Jacob and confirmed that his name was changed to Israel.

**What is our identity in Christ?** In our families we are each identified as husband, wife, father, mother, daughter, son, and perhaps brother and sister. Everybody gets a name that identifies us when we are born into our family. As believers, we get a new identity in Christ when we are born into the family of God. We will talk more about the identity God expects us to fill as we watch Jacob obey God.

### **Read Genesis 35:1-4 "Get Up!"**

God's instructions for Jacob to, "Get up! Go to Bethel and settle there," remind me of the words we often use in GriefShare, "You have to get up, suit up, and show up," because you cannot go back, you cannot stay where you are, you must move forward. God has plans for Jacob and they do not include staying where he is. God may not plan for us to move to Bethel but He does intend for us to move forward, growing in our relationship with Him.

**I find verse 3 interesting and wonder how it relates to your world today?** We have already talked about the get up and go part. Have you ever been so honored or blessed by God that you built an altar to worship Him? Jacob did. Do you realize that God has answered you in your day of distress? Jacob did. Do you realize He has been with you everywhere you have gone? Jacob did. Have you been focused on Christ to the point that you realize He has been with you in all these events? Jacob is experiencing all of these feelings and memories just as we can and should today.

**Does Jacob burying idols look like anything we should do today?** Well first, where did Jacob's family get all these idols? Remember a few chapters back when Rachel took her father's idols as they were preparing to leave Haran. Also recall how Dinah's brothers killed all the men in Shechem. I expect as they plundered and ransacked the entire town they picked up plenty of idols and jewels. These were coveted things that had become "the foreign gods that are among you."

**Are idols always "things?"** No. An idol is anything that distracts us from a Godly focus, whatever keeps us from being focused on Christ, whatever tempts us. Whatever these idols are, we need to remove them, renounce them, reject them, and as Jacob did, bury them.

**Why did Moses include this story?** Just as Jacob was putting the past behind him, Moses' original audience, the nation of Israel, needed to move on as well. Moses is showing them how God had remembered His covenant with Jacob, so they must never forget God's faithfulness to them.

### **Read Genesis 35:5-8 “Build”**

**Why did God need to intervene as Jacob and his clan traveled to Bethel?** Jacob’s sons had talked all the men of Shechem into getting circumcised, then killed them, and then plundered the entire town. Jacob feared retaliation as they traveled. God’s intervention demonstrated how He was with Jacob and was faithful to protect him just as He had promised. Moses needed the Israelites to understand God’s faithfulness, just as we need to understand God’s faithfulness today.

**Why did Jacob rename Bethel to El Bethel?** This was the first place God revealed himself to Jacob. Remember when Jacob was running from brother Esau several chapters back. That night he used a rock for a pillow and dreamed of the stairway to heaven with God’s angels going up and down. That is when he named this place Bethel. This is where God extended the covenant to Jacob. Now, as we see today, God has instructed Jacob to get up and go back to that place and settle there. He builds an altar there and renames the place El Bethel because it was here that God revealed himself to Jacob.

**What does Bethel mean?** Bethel means “the house of God.” El Bethel means “the God of the house of God.” This places the emphasis on God, not the place. When we arrive at our place of worship, is our emphasis on our comfort, the beauty of our surroundings, the sounds we hear, who is sitting in our pew, or is our emphasis on God, not the place?

**Why would Moses include verse 8 about Deborah in this story?** Deborah was the one who had nursed and raised Rebekah, her wet nurse. She followed Rebekah from Abraham’s homeland in Haran to Canaan when Rebekah left her family to become Isaac’s wife (24:59). She would have been present during Jacob’s childhood and most likely helped to raise the two brothers. She probably knew of the family’s lies, deceit and secrets. Moses likely included Deborah’s death because it was a generational event in the life of Jacob.

### **Read Genesis 35:9-15 “Renewed”**

**What is the emphasis in these verses?** God is blessing Jacob. He named him Israel as was promised earlier in chapter 32. God identified himself as “God Almighty” (El Shaddai). It was “God Almighty” that had the covenant with Abraham. Isaac blessed Jacob saying, “May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you” (28:3).

**What is a believer’s identity in Christ?** Page 73 in your quarterly titles our lesson “Renewed” with a sub-title “God gives His people an identity He expects them to fulfill.” That means He does give us an identity. That identity comes from Christ. Who has given Jacob a new identity? God Almighty.

What God says about who we are is truer than what the world says about who we are. What God says about who we are is truer than what we think about ourselves.

When we find our identity in a role that we have or in something that might change, then what happens when that role changes or that relationship changes? Our identity doesn’t come from ourselves, it comes from Him.

**What do we miss out on when we do not fulfill our identity in Christ?** If we do not fulfill our identity in Christ, we never really understand who we are or the resources that are available to us as believers. We are always trying to identify or understand our identity based on things that change or disappear.

Jesus died on the cross to give us this new identity. Our identity is in Him. No one can take that identity away from us. We are secure in who we are as believers.

Through our study of Jacob, we have seen him grow in his relationship with God. As he grew in Christ, as he followed Christ, he was given a new identity. We may not receive an official name change but we too have a new identity in Christ.