

The Story of Jacob
Heroes of Faith Series
Week 15: God Blesses Jacob; Esau's Descendants

Scripture

Genesis 35-36

Motivation

Have you ever tried to *turn over a new leaf* or *turn the page* on your past only to realize your past still has a powerful grip on you?

You've tried realigning your life but *old habits, sins, or friends* keep pulling you back.

That's Jacob. He's been on the run and caught in the cycle of his weakness and sin.

It's like when you finally decide to clean out your garage. You go in determined: *"This time I'm going to get it organized."*

But the deeper you dig, the more you realize there's junk you've just been living with.

Old boxes, broken tools, stuff you've held onto for years that doesn't belong. **But, if you don't haul it out, you'll never actually have space for what matters.**

That's what God is doing with Jacob in Genesis 35. He's saying: *"Jacob, it's time to clear the junk. Put away the foreign gods. Purify yourself. Make room for Me again."*

Genesis 35–36 shows us what happens when you let God lead through the cleanup and into His promises.

Will you stay stuck living in cycles of compromise, or will you move toward your new identity in Christ, new purpose, and the new future God offers?

Jacob's story is worth leaning into. God's call to Jacob is the same for us: *Don't stay where you are. Come back to Bethel.*

Genesis 35:1 (NLT) Then God said to Jacob, "Get ready and move to Bethel and settle there. Build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother, Esau."

Information

What it takes to start over...

▪ **A willing heart to change course**

- ✓ A willingness to reject sin

Genesis 35:2 (NLT) So Jacob told everyone in his household, “Get rid of all your pagan idols, purify yourselves, and put on clean clothing. **3** We are now going to Bethel, where I will build an altar to the God who answered my prayers when I was in distress. He has been with me wherever I have gone.”

- ✓ A willingness to let go of sin (for something better)

Genesis 35:4 (NLT) So they gave Jacob all their pagan idols and earrings, and he buried them under the great tree near Shechem. **5** As they set out, a terror from God spread over the people in all the towns of that area, so no one attacked Jacob’s family.

“It was dangerous for Jacob to set out to Bethel, but it was more dangerous for him to disobey God.” – David Guzik

- ✓ A willingness to return to a place of obedience

Genesis 35:6 (NLT) Eventually, Jacob and his household arrived at Luz (also called Bethel) in Canaan. **7** Jacob built an altar there and named the place El-bethel (which means “God of Bethel”), because God had appeared to him there when he was fleeing from his brother, Esau.

- ✓ A willingness to take on a new identity

Genesis 35:9 (NLT) Now that Jacob had returned from Paddan-aram, God appeared to him again at Bethel. God blessed him, **10** saying, “Your name is Jacob, but you will not be called Jacob any longer. From now on your name will be Israel.” So God renamed him Israel.

Jacob is renamed ‘Israel,’ meaning one who wrestles with God—not to mark his strength, but to show God’s power prevails when we cling to Him.

- ✓ A willingness to believe God’s promises

Genesis 35:11 (NLT) Then God said, “I am El-Shaddai—‘God Almighty.’ Be fruitful and multiply. You will become a great nation, even many nations. Kings will be among your descendants! **12** And I will give you the land I once gave to Abraham and Isaac. Yes, I will give it to you and your descendants after you.” **13** Then God went up from the place where he had spoken to Jacob. **14** Jacob set up a stone pillar to mark the place where God had spoken to him. Then he poured wine over it as an offering to God and anointed the pillar with olive oil. **15** And Jacob named the place Bethel (which means “house of God”), because God had spoken to him there.

When God reminds us of His promises, our only right response is worship.

■ **An embrace of life's changing seasons** (*life never stays as it is*)

✓ The death of Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel

Genesis 35:16 (NLT) Leaving Bethel, Jacob and his clan moved on toward Ephrath. But Rachel went into labor while they were still some distance away. Her labor pains were intense. **17** After a very hard delivery, the midwife finally exclaimed, "Don't be afraid—you have another son!" **18** Rachel was about to die, but with her last breath she named the baby Ben-oni (which means "son of my sorrow"). The baby's father, however, called him Benjamin (which means "son of my right hand"). **19** So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). **20** Jacob set up a stone monument over Rachel's grave, and it can be seen there to this day.

✓ The death of Jacob's father, Isaac

Genesis 35:27 (NLT) So Jacob returned to his father, Isaac, in Mamre, which is near Kiriath-arba (now called Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had both lived as foreigners. **28** Isaac lived for 180 years. **29** Then he breathed his last and died at a ripe old age, joining his ancestors in death. And his sons, Esau and Jacob, buried him.

When life changes, even in sorrow or pain, we must trust Him.

■ **A determination to stay on course**

In Genesis 35, Jacob finally responds to God's call: he purifies his household, buries the idols, returns to Bethel, and lets God rename him Israel.

It's a turning point—a new course for his life and his family. But the Bible doesn't leave us with Jacob's story alone.

In Genesis 36, we get Esau's genealogy. Why? To remind us that while Jacob chose God's path, Esau chose another. Two brothers. Two very different legacies.

Jacob's family becomes God's covenant people. Esau's family becomes Edom, a nation that, in the future, will often oppose God's people.

Genesis 36 isn't just filler—it's a contrast. It forces us to ask...

Which path am I on? The path of renewal with God, or the path of self-made success without Him?"

Application

What do we do with Jacob's Story?

- **Pursue purity in daily life**

Do a spiritual inventory daily: What idols (comforts, distractions, habits) are subtly pulling you from Bethel? Confess them. Remove them. Submit to God's refining work—and invite His presence.

- **Trust in God's sovereign plan**

Even when others walk away or choose differently, God's plans never unravel. Your path, others' paths—He weaves them toward His good purpose. Rest in His sovereignty, even in relational complexity or uncertainty.

- **Mark special moments where God met you where you were at**

Remember when Jacob built a pillar at Bethel?

Genesis 35:14 (NLT) Jacob set up a stone pillar to mark the place where God had spoken to him.

Be certain to mark significant spiritual encounters. Whether in prayer, repentance, worship.

Let these moments remind you...This is where God met me.

Return there often, especially when your faith is wavering.