

GENESIS

Lesson 51

Genesis 35: Jacob Gets A New Name

Jacob Returns to Bethel

¹ Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau."

² So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes." ³ Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." ⁴ So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. ⁵ Then they set out, and the terror of God fell on the towns all around them so that no one pursued them.

⁶ Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. ⁷ There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel, because it was there that God revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

⁸ Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried under the oak outside Bethel. So it was named Allon Bakuth.

⁹ After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. ¹⁰ God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel.

¹¹ And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will be among your descendants." ¹² The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you." ¹³ Then God went up from him at the place where he had talked with him.

¹⁴ Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. ¹⁵ Jacob called the place where God had talked with him Bethel.

The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac

¹⁶ Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. ¹⁷ And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, "Don't despair, for you have another son." ¹⁸ As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin.

¹⁹ So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). ²⁰ Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb.

²¹ Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder. ²² While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it.

Jacob had twelve sons:

²³ The sons of Leah:

Reuben the firstborn of Jacob,

Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun.

²⁴ The sons of Rachel:

Joseph and Benjamin.

²⁵ The sons of Rachel's servant Bilhah:

Dan and Naphtali.

²⁶ The sons of Leah's servant Zilpah:

Gad and Asher.

These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram.

²⁷ Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. ²⁸ Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. ²⁹ Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

Genesis 35:1-29 [NIV]

In this lesson, we will see God giving Jacob a new name, and we will also encounter the deaths of Rachel and Isaac.

Jacob Gets A New Name

We can see the transformation continuing in Jacob from what we observed earlier when he went from being the deceiver and "heel-catcher" to the "one who struggles with God" in Genesis 32:28. Now, in Genesis 35:9-12, God reaffirms Jacob's new name and gives him the same covenant that he had previously given to Abraham. We should note that in Genesis 35:2, before he met with God in Bethel, that Jacob purposefully put away his idols and purified himself. Clearly, Jacob has been transformed, and his new name reflects that transformation.

The New Testament has much to say about our transformation as followers of Christ and the new name that awaits us.

Read the following and note what each tell us about being a new creature through Christ.

1. Romans 12:2 - *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will."*
2. Corinthians 5:16-17 - *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:"*
3. Ephesians 4:22-24 - *"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*
4. Revelation 2:17 - *"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it."*

In summary, we observe many parallels between Jacob's transformation and name change and our transformation as followers of Christ. Truly, we are not the person we were on the day we accepted Christ, and we will spend the rest of our earthly lives being transformed in anticipation of our resurrection and eternal existence with God, Jesus, and his Holy Spirit. Life on this earth is challenging, painful, and ends in death. However, our life with Jesus and living in his kingdom is rewarding and brings eternal blessings, including a new you and a new name!

The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac

Following the death of Rachel, Reuben sleeps with his father's concubine Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid. This will lead to the loss of his birthright. We note this in two different scripture references:

- Genesis 49:1-4 – *Then Jacob called for his sons and said: "Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come. Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel. Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power. Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it."*
- 1 Chronicles 5:1 – *The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (he was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father's marriage bed, his rights as firstborn were given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel; so he could not be listed in the genealogical record in accordance with his birthright.*

Finally, I want to point out something often missed in most Bible lessons around this passage.

Consider the following question:

5. How old was Isaac when he died, and how old was he when he thought he was dying and gave his blessing to Jacob instead of Esau?

The above means that Isaac lived another fifty years past the time that he originally thought he would die. Are we doing something similar? Are we short-changing God by artificially limiting our work in the kingdom based on internal suppositions about how long we think we will live before Christ calls us home? Instead, we should have the mind of Caleb in Joshua 14:6-15. Caleb was eighty-five and still wanted God to challenge him. He asked the Lord to give him ground to take, and he took it. God gave him the country surrounding Hebron—at the age of 85.

We don't know how long God will grant each of us to live on this earth, and not all of us have the physical capabilities that we would like to have; but no matter our circumstance, we should strive to work in God's Kingdom until the very day God calls us home. Let's not stop working just because we are getting older.

In Genesis 35, the closing verses detail the twelve sons of Jacob/Israel, his descendants. In the next lesson, in Chapter 36, we will look at Esau and his descendants.

Thanks for studying with us!

In Christ,

Wes