

## Renewal in Jacob's Life

### Genesis 35:1-15

Genesis 35:1-15 - *"Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother."*

<sup>2</sup> *And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. <sup>3</sup> Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone." <sup>4</sup> So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem.*

<sup>5</sup> *And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. <sup>6</sup> So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. <sup>7</sup> And he built an altar there and called the place El Bethel, because there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother.*

<sup>8</sup> *Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the terebinth tree. So the name of it was called Allon Bachuth.*

<sup>9</sup> *Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him. <sup>10</sup> And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name." So He called his name Israel. <sup>11</sup> Also God said to him: "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. <sup>12</sup> The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land." <sup>13</sup> Then God went up from him in the place where He talked with him. <sup>14</sup> So Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it. <sup>15</sup> And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Bethel."*

### Background Notes

Jacob and his family stayed as long as ten years in the areas of Succoth and Shechem. They were not happy years. It appears that God had wanted Jacob to go back to Bethel, where He had appeared to him 30 years before. When Jacob left Haran God said, *"I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family"* (31:13).

But Jacob did not go back to Bethel, nor did he return to his boyhood home. He moved back into the land, but he settled near Shechem, a pagan city. It seems that Jacob was like a lot of Christians today - he was not fully committed, and he was only partially obedient. He had one foot in the world, apparently because he wanted the wealth that he could obtain from this world. Are you like that?

The ancient trade route connecting Shechem and Hebron passed within a couple of miles of Bethel, and Bethel was only about 15-20 miles south of Shechem, but it appears that Jacob never went back to Bethel until after the disastrous events at Shechem. Isaac was living in Hebron at this time, about 50 miles south of Shechem, and Jacob may have visited his aging father while he was living in Shechem. In fact, Rebekah's nurse, Deborah, may have returned to Shechem with Jacob after a visit with his father, and continued to reside there with Jacob's family until her death (v8).

However, after the terrible events of Genesis 34, the rape of Dinah, and two of his sons killing of all the men of Shechem, Jacob was ready to return to Bethel. So when God said "go up to Bethel," Jacob obeyed. *"Then God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother' (v1). 'Not here in Shechem, Jacob! Go to Bethel! That is where I want you to build your altar to God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.'*"

So Jacob and his family left Shechem and went to Bethel, and God blessed this move. There was revival and renewal in Jacob's family at this point. Let's look at some of the essentials for revival and renewal in Jacob's life.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Severing past entanglements is essential to renewal and blessing.

Before the family left for Bethel, Jacob took all the foreign gods and earrings and buried them underneath a tree before they left for Bethel (v2-4). [Are any of you wearing earrings today? You pagans! I can't believe it! Well, of course I'm only kidding!] In that culture, earrings were cult objects, and those cultic objects had to go. The household idols that Rachel had taken from Laban, and any other idols and cult objects that any of the servants had - all that stuff had to go! Then they bathed, and changed their clothes. This was symbolic of a clean break with the past. Severing past entanglements is essential to renewal and blessing.

Do you have any past entanglements that are holding you back from worship – things that are holding you back from renewal in your soul and blessing on your life? Maybe you have some bad habits that you need to give up. Maybe you had past sinful involvements that have not been completely broken. Maybe you have some wrong or detrimental relationships that need to be severed. **Making a clean break with the past is essential!** Severing past entanglements is essential to renewal and blessing.

Let me mention the subject of cult objects today. If you have any cultic or pagan-associated objects around your house, you should get rid of them! "Cultic objects" would be such things as decorative "Buddha-type" figurines, or New Age crystals (or all New Age books or items), or tarot cards, or Ouija boards, or objects that claim to bring "good luck" or thwart the "evil eye," or objects and books about witchcraft or the occult.

In addition, in my opinion, believers should not buy carvings such as jewelry engraved with possibly pagan symbols, masks and spears, Egyptian scarabs, or other “souvenir” items from other countries that may have cultic connections. It is unwise to bring back this type of item to decorate your home or to give as a gift, because some of these objects may be tied into pagan religious ceremonies or pagan worship. **Demonic influence can continue to be associated with cultic objects!** Even some missionaries may not be aware of this problem, when they return to this country with such objects as decorations, gifts or mementoes. **It is very important to get rid of objects that may have cultic connections.** Severing past entanglements is essential to renewal and blessing.

## **2. Obeying past commands is essential to renewal and blessing.**

Jacob finally obeyed God’s past command to return to Bethel, and as a result there was renewal and blessing in his life. *“Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him”* (v9). Finally he was back at Bethel, where the Lord wanted him. Jacob’s life was not blessed when he lived at Shechem - in fact, God’s name was not mentioned once in Genesis 34. However, in Genesis 35 there was blessing, and God’s name was mentioned 11 times in the first 15 verses! God’s presence was evident in Jacob’s life in chapter 35. Why? Because Jacob was finally doing what God had asked him to do!

Obedience, renewal, and blessing go together. Notice how God protected Jacob and his family (v5). Notice that Jacob’s new name, Israel, was reaffirmed (v10). Notice that God revealed Himself to Jacob as El Shaddai, or “God Almighty” (v11), and notice that the covenant promises were confirmed again to Jacob (v11-12). The renewed flow of blessing came when Jacob finally obeyed past commands, and came back to Bethel.

Is it possible that renewal and blessing cannot come to your life because of disobedience, or maybe partial obedience? Did the Lord speak to you in the past about something He wanted you to do - or not do? Did you obey, or did you turn a deaf ear? It may not be too late! Revival and blessing can come to your life! Obeying past commands is essential to renewal and blessing.

## **3. Remembering past blessing is essential to renewal and blessing.**

Notice what Jacob said in verse 3, *“Let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.”*

Jacob was remembering past blessings. He named the place “El Bethel.” This shows progress in Jacob’s spiritual growth. Back in chapter 28, he called the place Bethel, or “House of God.” Now he calls the place El Bethel, “God of the House of God.” This indicates that he had drawn closer to God.

Now that he was back at Bethel, Jacob remembered past blessings. He set up a stone pillar in the place where he talked with God, poured a drink offering on it, then poured oil on it, and named the place where God spoke with him. This is the first mention of a “drink offering” in the Bible. It consisted of pouring out water or wine. The drink offering and the oil poured out were symbolic acts of devotion and consecration as Jacob remembered past blessings. Remembering past blessings is essential to renewal and blessing.

Do you remember past blessings? Do you “count your blessings and name them one by one,” as the hymn says? When was the last time, for example, you thanked the Lord for Christians in your past who have helped in your spiritual growth as a believer? Did you ever write a thank you letter to those people? Remembering past blessings is essential to renewal and blessing.

## Practical Application

### You’re never too old for renewal!

Maybe you think that revival and renewal is only for younger generation. Maybe you think that you’re too old for a fresh outpouring of blessing upon your life. Well, how old do you think Jacob was at this point? He was probably about 107 years old! I’m sure you’re thinking, “Well, they lived longer in those days.” That’s true, but Jacob died at 147 years old (Genesis 47:28), so at 107, Jacob was not exactly young!

You are never too old for renewal, so what is the secret? The secret is going back to Bethel! How do we get back to Bethel? Remember our doctrinal points:

- 1- Sever past entanglements!** Do you have any entanglements that need to be severed? This may be something you need to think through before the Lord.
- 2 - Obey past commands!** Is there anything the Lord has asked you to do, but you’re only partially obeying - or not obeying at all?
- 3- Remember past blessings!** Are you counting your blessings, or are you dissatisfied and unhappy? Are you a Christian who is bitter and soured on life? Are you a complainer?

Where are you, spiritually, in reference to Bethel? Are you “living at Bethel,” where the Lord wants you, or are you living primarily for your own selfish satisfaction? Are you at the place in your life where God can renew your spirit and bless you? Remember, you’re never too old for renewal!