

• *God reminded 'Israel' of His promises*

There are times when we need a reminder of who we are and where we are with God. God was reminding 'Israel' of His promises (I put it in inverted commas, '...', to make it clear that we are talking about 'Israel' the person not Israel the nation). Jacob has become 'Israel' – a fighter with God, someone who gets God's blessings by admitting defeat ¹. God is 'El Shaddai', the God who comes to the help of the helpless.

¹ 35:10

The calling operating in Israel's life

God reminded 'Israel' of the calling that was operating in his life. 'You are going to be fruitful' said God. 'Whole nations are going to come out of you and your line of descendants' ¹. 'The land of Canaan is going to be given to you' ².

¹ 35:11
² 35:12

• *God's past rescues*

None of this was new. God had told Jacob before that his name was 'Israel' ¹. God had appeared as El Shaddai – the God of the helpless – long ago in the days of Abraham. It was as the God who rescued the helpless that He came to the aid of Abraham and enabled the promises to go forward ². And the promise of land and of prosperity had been given to 'Israel' before ³. So these things were not new to 'Israel'.

¹ see 32:28
² see 17:1
³ see 28:13–15

• *Without reminders we may sometimes lose our spiritual clear-sightedness*

There are times in our lives when we need to be reminded who we are, who God is, and what our calling is. Otherwise we forget and lose our spiritual clear-sightedness.

• *God appeared to Israel for a third time*

The vision of our identity, our God and our calling becomes dim and we need to be reminded all over again. God appeared to 'Israel'; it was the third time in 'Israel's' life when he had received such an experience and it came at a time when he was at his worst and needed help from God. It was a definite and powerful experience of God in visible form; then the appearance of God was withdrawn ¹.

¹ 35:13

'Israel' responded to God's reminder

'Israel' responded to God's reminder. He built a stone pillar ¹; it was his way of commemorating what had happened. He wanted to remember Bethel for ever. He poured out a drink offering ²; the symbolism spoke of total self-dedication in which one 'pours oneself out' to God, as Jesus poured out His soul unto death ³. He poured oil on the stone memorial ⁴; this spoke of consecration and dedication as a sacred site; in the ancient world oil was used in ceremonial consecration.

¹ 35:14
² 35:14
³ Isaiah 53:10
⁴ 35:14

• *In many troubles he had to trust God*

'Israel' has to trust in God's presence through many troubles. Jacob named the place 'Bethel'. He never wanted to forget the place as the place where God had twice met with him in dramatic circumstances ¹.

¹ 35:15

• *Trust God – even in Rachel's death*

Soon Jacob had difficult circumstances in which to trust God. There is **Rachel's death**. Rachel struggled in childbirth ¹ and in her great distress gave her son a gloomy, pessimistic name ². Jacob's sense of God's presence is still with him and he is more optimistic than Rachel. He names the new child 'Benjamin', 'son of the south' or 'son of the right hand'. Benjamin was to be regarded as the honoured son of Jacob's much-loved wife Rachel. 'Israel' built a monument to his much-loved wife and continued to travel towards Ephrah ³.

¹ 35:16–17
² 35:18

³ 35:19–21

• *Trust God – even in Reuben's sin*

There is **Reuben's sin**. One of 'Israel's' sons sins with Bilhah, one of Jacob's concubines ¹. It seems that as the firstborn son he wants to take from his father the leadership of the clan, and this is an ancient way of taking leadership (see 2 Samuel 16:15–23 for a similar incident).

¹ 35:22

The passing of Isaac's generation

• *Jacob's response to God's assurances*

• *God's will would continue through Joseph and then Judah*

• *Jacob's ministry was for beyond his lifetime*

• *Jacob returned to Bethel – and a new revelation from God*

In our lives, whatever happens, God's presence reminds us that in Him we are safe

Then there is **the passing of Isaac's generation**. Rebekah had already died. Now there were twelve sons ^{□1} and the previous generation passes away. Isaac is the last to go. Jacob is with him at the end, and Jacob and Esau are together at his burial ^{□2}.

Jacob needed to respond to God's assurances to him because he was in a time when everything around him was being uprooted and unsettled. Many of his sons were turning out to be disappointments to him. His wife, Rachel, was extremely precious to him. He would refer later to the day when 'Rachel died, to my sorrow' ^{□1}.

It was the end of an epoch. The main purpose of God would soon pass from Jacob to Joseph and to Judah. Reuben had disgraced himself. Simeon and Levi had proved themselves to be men of great violence. The family inheritance would pass through Judah, the fourth son. And Joseph would also have a very major part to play in the events that are about to take place.

Sometimes events happen in our lives that force us to look to the future. Jacob's ministry is not simply for his own lifetime. It is tied up with the future, with what will happen after his life has come to an end, and with the future of the kingdom of God.

The Jacob-story ends at this point. When Jacob appears again it will be in connection with the story of Joseph. The last event in the Jacob-story is that of his return to Bethel and the incidents connected with it. God gave Jacob a new revelation. We can keep going through any trouble as long as God reveals Himself to us. The troubles may be great.

The sinfulness of those close to us may be oppressive. There may be constant reminders that life is short. Our most precious companions may be taken from us. But if God appears and reminds us of who we are, who He is, and what He is promising to do – all will be well. We must not get too caught up with earthly pleasures and successes; events will soon take place that will remind us that our ultimate hope is not in this world. The question is: as life moves steadily on towards eternity are we conscious that we are laying up treasure in heaven? Do we have the conviction that we are achieving something for God? Our identity, our God, our calling are safe and that is all that really matters.

□1 35:23–26

□2 35:27–29

□1 Genesis 48:7



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