

Icebreaker:

Do you have a place from your past that signifies spiritual importance to you? What is it?

Questions:

1. Why was it necessary for Jacob to instruct his household: "Put away the foreign gods"? Do you find it odd how they "put away" their foreign gods? Why or why not?
2. Are there gods or idols in your household that you want to bury? Can you name at least one idol you want to bury?
3. What role does the church community play in helping you to bury the idols and gods in your life?
4. In verse 8 we read of the death of Rebekah's nurse. What was sad about her death? "Allon-bacuth" means "oak of weeping." When Jacob returned home from uncle Laban's, whom did he not meet?
5. Why would God need to tell Jacob again that his new name is Israel? Why would Jacob need to hear it again in this context?
6. Jacob sets up a stone pillar in verse 14. When you review your life, do you see "pillars" of God's hand? How have you marked those pillars and are such pillars an aid to you?
7. Is there a part of the worship service (singing, prayer, confession, sermon, communion, etc.) that is particularly helpful in reminding you who God is?

Prayer:

As your group closes in prayer, please remember the requests of our church family.

> Prayers of healing for Joan Gall, Dan Krajnovich, Ken Miller, and Bob Steinmetz.

Requests from ZPC's March Prayer Calendar:

> Pray for missionary Dan McNerney as he works within the exploding Christian movement in Iran. And for Dan Duke's ministry with linguists in Cameroon and in Europe to help with Bible translations.

God had revealed himself to Jacob more than 20 years ago. Now God reveals himself to Jacob again as he returns to his homeland. We should hope that God reveals himself to us today at important times and places, even in the major transitions of our lives. God also tells Jacob and his family to bury their gods. God and Jacob use community and repetition to help them be done with old gods and to be reminders of who God really is in their lives.

Questions:

[Question 1] It was necessary because they were still carrying old gods. Rachel had stolen her father's small idols. They were in a new land and needed to be reminded that God is their one true God. They buried their old gods because they were "dead to me." They did this in community for accountability and because it was truly important to do and to share.

[Question 2] Jerry showed several items in his sermon. It could be the cell phone, the car, our kids, our families, our jobs, our place in the community, or any habit or addiction. Whatever idol is holding you back from being fully devoted to God, it is good to find a way to "bury" that god.

[Question 3] If we tell others that we are getting rid of an idol, they can celebrate that act with us. They can ask us if we have "dug it up." They can help hold us accountable and be excited for us that we are turning a new page in our lives. Healthy community gives us strength.

[Question 4] The death of Rebekah's nurse could reveal a special relationship with the nurse. More likely it reveals that Rebekah, Jacob's mother, had died while he had been away. She had said when Jacob deceived Isaac, "let the curse fall on me." (Genesis 27:13) Perhaps her curse is that she is not mentioned again in this passage and she never sees her favorite son again. Our actions have consequences, including Jacob's and Rebekah's actions.

[Question 5] Repetition is important. We learn through repetition. Jacob is now "home" and needs to hear again his new identity. Jacob is reminded that he is now Israel, one who "struggles with God" and overcame that struggle and survived with a limp. His family will be the 12 tribes and a great nation; he is not just a "heel grabber."

[Question 6] Jacob hears from God and meets God at Bethel – "house of God." Our pillars may not be specific places but specific times where God met with us, was present with us, and helped us. These may be places, or more likely are favorite or poignant memories that we have marked in our minds as we remember God's love and presence.

[Question 7] These parts of worship may not actually be things we like. For example, we all have different tastes in music. We may not like a certain worship song, but it is a reminder that we worship God in different ways and that the person next to you worships God through that song. We are reminded that difficult parts of our lives can shape us to turn our hearts to God, be more like God, and remember who God is.