

## Renewed

*God gives His people an identity He expects them to fulfill.*

### **GENESIS 35:1-15**

Our understanding of who we are goes a long way in determining what we will become. The foundation for understanding who we are is first laid within the context of family. As soon as we come into the world, we are a daughter or son, possibly a sister or brother. We are given a name that identifies what we call ourselves and what others call us. As we age, we develop our sense of personal identity. As believers, we are given a new identity in Christ when we're born into the family of God—an identity God expects us to fulfill.

How has your family impacted your sense of personal identity?

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## UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

### **GENESIS 34:1–37:1**

Eventually, Jacob moved his family west across the Jordan River to the city of Shechem in the heart of Canaan. Hamor the Hivite was the chieftain of the region, so Jacob purchased land from Hamor and built there an altar to God (Gen. 33:18-20). The Hivites were a subgroup of the Canaanites. Jacob and Leah's daughter Dinah was Jacob's only daughter, so it is not surprising that she would want to go out among the Canaanites, probably seeking the companionship of other young ladies her age.

Dinah's decision to leave the protection of her family had terrible consequences. The chieftain's son, Shechem, raped her. The Hebrew word for rape carries with it the meaning of violence, affliction, humiliation, and defilement. Oddly, when Jacob learned that Shechem had raped Dinah, he said or did nothing in response.

After raping Dinah, Shechem became fixated with her and demanded that his father, Hamor, get her to be his wife (34:1-4). But it wasn't Jacob, the seasoned negotiator, who negotiated with Hamor, it was Jacob's sons. They were outraged when they learned Shechem had raped Dinah. But Hamor assured them that Shechem loved Dinah and it would be good for everyone if their peoples intermarried and shared the land.

Jacob's sons slyly told Hamor that if all of the men of Shechem would be circumcised, then they would agree to the offer. So all the men of Shechem were circumcised. While they were incapacitated, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's full brothers, slaughtered every male in the city. Then the other brothers plundered everything in the city. Only then did Jacob respond, lamenting the trouble they had brought upon him in the eyes of the Canaanites in the land.

From this point forward in Genesis, the focus turns to Jacob's sons. They are shown to lack moral fiber. God would keep His covenant promises in spite of the moral failures of Israel's forefathers, once again highlighting His grace toward His covenant people.

Read Genesis 35:1-15. What was God's purposes for Jacob and his family?

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## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### GET UP! (GEN. 35:1-4)

<sup>1</sup> God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." <sup>2</sup> So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments." <sup>3</sup> Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone." <sup>4</sup> So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem.

### VERSE 1

God is always watching over His children, and His timing is impeccable. When Jacob became afraid of what the Canaanites might do to him and his family after his sons slaughtered the men of Shechem and plundered the city, God spoke to him. *Bethel* was the first place God had revealed Himself to Jacob as he was fleeing from his brother Esau (Gen. 27:41-45). At Bethel, God had extended to Jacob the covenant He had made with Abraham and Isaac. He promised Jacob His ongoing presence and protection. Returning to Bethel would be a reminder to Jacob of God's promises to him.

God told Jacob, *Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there and make an altar there*. Bethel was about fifteen miles south of Shechem. Previously at Bethel, Jacob had vowed that if God would bless him and bring him back safely, he would establish Bethel as a place of worship (28:20-22). It was now time for Jacob to keep his vow. Perhaps the troubles he experienced at Shechem would have been avoided if he had been more diligent about returning to Bethel in the first place and keeping his vow to God.

Read Genesis 28:10-15 and describe what had happened previously at Bethel. Why do you think God called Jacob to return to there?

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## VERSES 2-3

Jacob promptly spoke to his family and everyone else with them—his servants, the slaves from Shechem, and Deborah. He told them to do three things: *put away the foreign gods* they had with them, to *purify* themselves, and to *change* their *garments*. Regarding the first command, it is probable they had idolatrous items among them that they had just recently plundered in Shechem. However, it is also possible that others had brought idols from Haran with them, just as Rachel had when she stole her father's household idols (31:19). Still, others among them were actually worshiping idols. Keeping the commands in verse 2 would demonstrate they were not approaching God in a casual way but in humility and reverence (Lev. 6:10-11; 2 Sam. 12:20).

Write out a prayer for your family based on verse 2.

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Jacob explained the reason for his commands. God had directed them to *arise and go up to Bethel*. Also, Jacob said he was going to *make there an altar* to the God who answered his prayers in his *day of . . . distress*. This referred to his difficulties involving Esau and Laban. It is significant that Jacob remembered how God had been faithful to him. Moses's original audience, the nation of Israel, needed to recognize that, just as God remembered his covenant with Jacob, they must never forget God's faithfulness to them.

## VERSE 4

Apparently, everyone responded to Jacob's instructions. What is noted is that they gave Jacob their *foreign gods* and *the rings that were in their ears*. There are possibly a couple of reasons why they turned in their earrings. It is possible the earrings were part of the spoils that came from the plunder of Shechem and had some religious significance. Perhaps at least some of the jewelry pieces had representations of Canaanite gods on them. It is also possible that the *foreign gods*, rather than the people, wore the earrings. Evidence exists that idols possessed earrings in the ancient Near East. When Jacob received these items, he buried them under a tree *near Shechem*, putting the debacle there behind them.

How can objects get in the way of your serving God?

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How does spiritual renewal happen and what does it look like?

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## DID YOU KNOW?

Shechem is sometimes associated with Sychar, the place where Jesus visited with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:5-6).

## BUILD (GEN. 35:5-8)

<sup>5</sup> And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. <sup>6</sup> And 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 there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother. <sup>8</sup> And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So he called its name Allon-bacuth.

## VERSES 5-8

Jacob was correct in thinking the Canaanites would retaliate against him and his family for what happened at Shechem. Yet God caused the Canaanites to be struck with the fear of Jacob and his clan so that they did not pursue them. God's intervention in the matter demonstrated again how God was with Jacob and was faithful to protect him just as He had promised (Gen. 28:15).

How does obedience to God serve as protection for the believer?

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On a number of occasions up until the conquest period, **Bethel** is called its original Canaanite name •**Luz** (28:19; 48:3; Josh. 16:2; 18:13; Judg. 1:23,26). Calling attention to its former name accentuates the significance of the new name and the events that took place there in the life of Jacob. What had been a common place was now a holy place because of God's revelation of Himself there. Calling attention to the name change also highlighted the change that God brought about in Jacob's life.

In recognition of Bethel's impact on his life and in obedience to God's command, Jacob **built an altar** at Bethel and called it **El-bethel**. This means "the God of Bethel" or more literally, "the God of the house of God." The doubled use of "God" in this name places the emphasis on God and not the place. It was God's presence and revelation of Himself there that made it a sacred place. This name recalls God's visitation to Jacob in a dream in Paddan-aram where God identified Himself to Jacob as "the God of Bethel" (Gen. 31:13). Furthermore, it recalls Jacob's first encounter with God at this location when he was fleeing from Esau, and Jacob named the place Bethel.

It may seem surprising and out of place to find the record of Deborah's death and burial in this narrative. There are two women in the Bible named **Deborah**, and the other one had a significant impact on the nation of Israel. This Deborah, who was Rebekah's nurse and nanny, is only mentioned here. Deborah's death and burial denotes the passing of the previous generation. Her presence with Jacob as he returned to Bethel further highlighted God's faithfulness to return Jacob home just as He promised. God's generational and geographical covenant promises were continuing to be fulfilled. Joseph named the place of her burial •**Allon-bacuth** ("oak of weeping").

### KEY DOCTRINE: *God*

God is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. (See Proverbs 19:21; Jeremiah 32:17.)

## RENEWED (GEN. 35:9-15)

<sup>9</sup> God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. <sup>10</sup> And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So he called his name Israel. <sup>11</sup> And God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. <sup>12</sup> The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you." <sup>13</sup> Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. <sup>14</sup> And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it. <sup>15</sup> So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

## VERSES 9-13

Unlike the first time God appeared to Jacob at Bethel (Gen. 28:17), there is no mention of Jacob's dread when God appeared to Him this time. The emphasis is on God blessing Jacob and recalls when God blessed him and changed his name to Israel at Peniel (32:28).

God repeated the renaming of **Jacob** to **Israel**, but there is a difference in what God emphasized here from what He emphasized the first time at Peniel. At Peniel, the emphasis was on a change of Jacob personally. He

was no longer Jacob the “supplanter” or “deceiver.” Instead, the one who struggled with God discovered his total dependence on God. However, here the emphasis was national, pertaining to Jacob and his offspring.

By identifying Himself as **God Almighty** (*El Shaddai*), God connected what He was about to promise Jacob to the promises He had made to Abraham and Isaac. *God Almighty* promised Abraham that He would multiply Abraham greatly and make him extremely fruitful. God Almighty also promised Abraham that nations and kings would come from him (17:2,6). Furthermore, Isaac blessed Jacob saying, “God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you” (28:3).

What is the significance of God identifying Himself to Jacob as “God Almighty”?

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In verses 12-13, God repeated to Jacob the covenant promises He had made to **Abraham and Isaac** concerning the **land**. God would give it to Jacob and his future offspring. In the most emphatic way of stating something in their culture, God used the word **give** to emphasize that the land was a gift. God’s grace encompasses the past, present, and future of His people. God had shown grace to Jacob’s forefathers, He was showing grace to Jacob, and He would continue to show His grace to Jacob’s future offspring. After saying these things, God withdrew from him there.

**BIBLE SKILL:** *Take seriously Biblical principles for Christian living.*

In Genesis 35:10-11, God reminded Jacob that his name had been changed to “Israel” to emphasize the patriarch’s new identity (see 32:28). God then revealed to Jacob His own name (“God Almighty”). Read Acts 11:26. Jesus’s followers were first called Christians in Antioch. The designation Christians was a nickname unbelievers applied to Christ’s followers, possibly in derision. Apparently these early believers lived out their faith to such an extent that outsiders recognized their behavior as Christlike and began identifying them as Christians or “little Christs.” How have your actions this week reflected the new identity you have received in Christ?

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## VERSES 14-15

Similar to what he had done when he first encountered God at Bethel, Jacob placed a **pillar of stone** there and consecrated it with **oil**. This time, he also offered a **drink offering** to God. This is the first mention of a **drink offering** in the Bible. The term “drink offering” is a little misleading because the offeror did not drink it but poured it out, in this case on the **pillar of stone**. It was an expression of worship. The scene concludes reinforcing the fact that Jacob had named the place **Bethel**, “the house of God,” as a reaffirmation of the covenant promises God previously made to Jacob.

How do God’s promises help a person understand His expectations for His people?

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## APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers are to examine their lives for idols.
- Believers can rest in knowing God provides for His people.
- Believers can live in light of God’s promises.

Discuss as a group how the promises of God in His Word should impact the way believers live. In what ways can you encourage one another to live in light of the promises of God?

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Examine your life for idols. What idols are tempting you away from faithfulness to God? What steps can you take to guard yourself from idols (see 1 John 5:21)?

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Memorize Genesis 35:11.

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**PRAYER NEEDS**

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