

Renewed

SESSION 8

Genesis 35:1-15

Memory Verse: Genesis 35:11

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

In our increasingly digital world, identity theft has become a major concern. As a result, identity theft protection companies promise to defend our information, monitor for any changes, and provide a guarantee against financial losses. Similarly, when we accept Christ as Savior, He gives us a new identity (2 Cor. 5:17); and He expects us to fulfill our new identity by growing toward spiritual maturity.

Because we all experience lapses in living up to our identity in Christ, we also need times of spiritual renewal. In today's session, Jacob and his family returned to Bethel to renew their commitment to the Lord. As you prepare this week, search your heart for areas where you need spiritual renewal. In addition, think about people in your group who also may need to renew their commitment. Ask God to help you experience Him in a new way and to use you to help others fulfill their identity as His children.



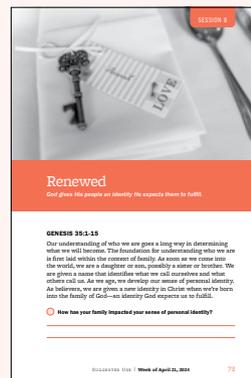
Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

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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. (PSG, p. 73)

How has your family impacted your sense of personal identity?



Understand the Context (Genesis 34:1–37:1)

Having settled at Shechem after his meeting with Esau, Jacob purchased land and set up an altar to God. There, his family experienced a devastating atrocity because of the loose morals of the Canaanites. Shechem, the son of a local chieftain, raped Jacob's daughter Dinah. Then, he wanted to take her as a wife. Jacob's sons became infuriated when they learned what had happened to their sister.

When Shechem's father approached Jacob's sons about Dinah, they responded deceitfully. They agreed to intermarry only if all the males in the Canaanite clan were circumcised. On the third day, when the Canaanite men were still in pain from the circumcision and could not defend themselves, Simeon and Levi, two of Dinah's full brothers, killed them all (Gen. 34:1-31).

After chastising his sons for their repulsive behavior, Jacob heard God's call to return to Bethel, the place where Jacob had dreamed of a stairway reaching from earth to heaven. Jacob had encountered God's presence at Bethel, and the Lord had renewed His covenant to Abraham and Isaac with him. The Lord also promised to accompany Jacob wherever he traveled. Jacob had set up a stone as a reminder of the Lord's presence in his life (see 28:1-22).

In Genesis 35, God commanded Jacob to return to Bethel. In response, Jacob instructed his family to get rid of their foreign gods and purify themselves. At Bethel, Jacob and his family renewed their commitment to fulfill their identity as God's people.

Also near Bethel, Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried. She had been part of Jacob's household. As they journeyed from Bethel toward

Bethlehem, Rachel died while giving birth to Benjamin. She named him Ben-oni, meaning "son of my sorrow." But Jacob called him Benjamin, which means "son of my right hand," which suggested a place of blessing and authority. Genesis 35 ends with a list of Jacob's sons, followed by a record of Isaac's death.

Chapter 36 provides a record of Esau's family. It begins by listing his Canaanite wives: Adah, Oholibamah, and Basemath. Most of the chapter details Esau's descendants through these three wives. His offspring occupied the land of Edom, and area south of the Dead Sea. The area consisted largely of wilderness, and many of its inhabitants were semi-nomads.

The land of Seir appears synonymous with Edom in some Scripture passages (32:3; 36:8; Judg. 5:4). While Esau and his descendants lived in Seir or Edom, Jacob and his descendants remained in the land to which Abraham had migrated, Canaan (Gen. 37:1). This was the land of promise for God's people, and Jacob had been chosen to continue the line of blessing from his grandfather, Abraham, and his father, Isaac.

Read Genesis 35:1-15. What was God's purposes for Jacob and his family? (PSG, p. 74)



PRIOR TO THE SESSION: Display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: The Travels of Jacob*), and **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Key Moments in Jacob's Life*). Gather one sheet of black paper and one sheet of white paper for reference during the session. Write these words on the board: *driver's license, passport, family tree, address, name.*



INTRODUCE: As adults arrive, lead the group to examine the words on the board and to determine what they have in common. After a few minutes, share that all the words relate to our identity.

STATE: *But our identity is much more than documents with our name on them or where we live.*

REFLECT: Encourage adults to reflect on how their identity might be described by others, including their family members. Enlist a volunteer to read the introduction on page 73 of the PSG.

ASK: **How has your family impacted your sense of personal identity?** (PSG, p. 73) Emphasize that God gives His people an identity He expects them to fulfill.



TRANSITION: *In today's session, we'll see how Jacob grew in his commitment to God. Decades after his experience at Bethel, he was called to return to the place where he had met God and to renew His loyalty to Him alone.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Music

Provide copies of the hymn "Trust and Obey" (*Baptist Hymnal 2008, No. 500*). Enlist a volunteer to read the verses as the group listens. Sing the chorus together. Encourage adults to focus on words that reflect God's promises. Point out that God works through our lives when we are faithful to obey Him. Challenge the group to consider how they can obey God more fully as they work through today's Scripture passages.

Get Up! (Genesis 35:1-4)

1 God said to Jacob, “Get up! Go to Bethel and settle there. Build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.” **2** So Jacob said to his family and all who were with him, “Get rid of the foreign gods that are among you. Purify yourselves and change your clothes. **3** We must get up and go to Bethel. I will build an altar there to the God who answered me in my day of distress. He has been with me everywhere I have gone.” **4** Then they gave Jacob all their foreign gods and their earrings, and Jacob hid them under the oak near Shechem.

(v. 1) Bethel: This location, originally known as Luz, had already played a significant role in Jacob’s spiritual pilgrimage (Gen. 28). **Bethel** served as a site of patriarchal and later tribal worship of the Lord. Eventually, it became second only to Jerusalem as a religious center.

(v. 1) Altar: The simplest, and perhaps earliest, kind of **altar** consisted of earth. The most commonly mentioned altar in the Old Testament is the stone altar. God’s instruction to Jacob at Bethel is the only occasion where the Lord specifically directed a patriarch (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) to build an altar. No explicit mention of an altar appears in Genesis 28, the record of Jacob’s initial arrival at the place he named Bethel. However, Jacob’s vow recorded in 28:20-22 involves a promise of worshiping the Lord at that site. Such worship would likely involve an altar. See also the comments on the term “altar” in Session 1 (p. 22).

(v. 1) Who appeared to you: This phrase refers to Jacob’s earlier experience at Bethel (Gen. 28:10-22). At that time God revealed Himself to Jacob as “the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac” (28:13). The name of **God** here is a shortened Hebrew form (*El*) of the name written in English as *Elohim*. *El* appears in 35:7 in the expression “El-bethel,” simply meaning “God of Bethel” or “God of the house of God.” These Hebrew names are general designations for God in contrast to the title “LORD,” a more personal designation (see Ex. 3:13-15). The term *El* emphasizes God as the source of strength and power—the Mighty One. The term *Elohim* focuses on God’s majesty.

(v. 2) Foreign gods: This expression designates man-made idols. The term **foreign** could also be translated “strange.” These objects should have been strange to God’s people because they were to worship only the one true God. The various people groups of Canaan worshiped idols. In fact, Jacob’s family may have confiscated these idolatrous objects when Jacob’s sons murdered the Shechemites (Gen. 34:24-30). However,

Rachel also brought idols with her from Aram (Gen. 31:19,25-35). Idol worship eventually led to the fall of the nation of Israel (see 2 Kings 17:6-20).

Key Word

Earrings

These **earrings** may have been part of the plunder from Levi and Simeon’s attack on Shechem (Gen. 34:29). They probably had some religious significance. Also, members of Jacob’s family may have worn earrings decorated with images of pagan gods. Another possibility is that the idols, rather than the people, wore the earrings. We have ample evidence that idols were adorned with earrings in the ancient Near East.

(v. 4) Oak: Although rendered **oak**, the exact identification of this tree is unclear. The same Hebrew word denotes where the angel of the Lord met Gideon (Judg. 6:11,19). Absalom caught his hair in such a tree (2 Sam. 18:9-10,14). Saul and his sons were buried under the oak in Jabesh (1 Chron. 10:12). The tree is also associated with idolatry (Ezek. 6:13; Hos. 4:13).

Key Place

●Shechem

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

EXPLORE Genesis 35:1-4



APPLICATION POINT: Believers are to examine their lives for idols.

CONTEXTUALIZE: Using **Pack Item 1** (*Map: The Travels of Jacob*), highlight the city of Shechem where Jacob had settled in Canaan. Use **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Key Moments in Jacob's Life*) to review Jacob's life.

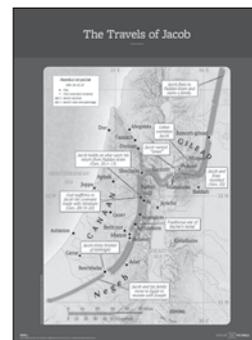
SUMMARIZE: Display the black sheet of paper, sharing that Genesis 34 is a dark chapter of rape and revenge. Point out that there is no mention of God in Genesis 34. Display the white sheet of paper to indicate a change in Genesis 35. *The first words in Genesis 35 are "God said," revealing a move from darkness into light.*

READ: **Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 35:1-4**, while the group listens to identify next steps for Jacob and his family. Briefly review Jacob's previous experience at Bethel.

ASK: **Why do you think God called Jacob to return there?** (PSG, p. 75)

EXAMINE: Direct the group to identify verbs in verses 1-4 that express urgency and record them on the board. Explain that Jacob's urgency came from God's command.

PRAY: Give each adult an index card and a pen. Encourage them to write a prayer for their families based on verse 2 as directed on page 76 of the PSG. Suggest they use this prayer as part of their time with God this week.



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Alarm Clock

Obtain an alarm clock or use the alarm on your phone. Show adults the clock or set off the alarm on your phone. Talk about why alarms are so important. Point out that the first thing God said to Jacob in Genesis 35:1 was to get up and get moving. Highlight that God's words to Jacob convey a sense of urgency. *Each morning, many of us hit the snooze button when the alarm sounds.* Emphasize that God urged Jacob to avoid that kind of attitude. Challenge adults to reject that attitude in their spiritual lives, as well.

Build (Genesis 35:5-8)

5 When they set out, a terror from God came over the cities around them, and they did not pursue Jacob's sons. **6** So Jacob and all who were with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. **7** Jacob built an altar there and called the place El-bethel because it was there that God had revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother. **8** Deborah, the one who had nursed and raised Rebekah, died and was buried under the oak south of Bethel. So Jacob named it Allon-bacuth.

Key Phrase

Terror from God:

The specific Hebrew term translated **terror** appears only in Genesis 35:5. It also can be rendered “fear.” The related verb identifies the terror or panic of military leaders who have lost their courage. It conveys the sense of being demoralized or dismayed. In a specific illustration, the verb describes the terror of the Israelite army when Goliath issued his challenge (1 Sam. 17:11). The term can also express awe or reverence.

(v. 5) Cities: In biblical Palestine, **cities** tended to be much smaller in both area and population than our modern concept of a city. The Old Testament distinguishes between a city and a village. The difference seems to be based not primarily on size but rather on the presence or absence of a defensive wall. A city was usually walled.

Inhabitants of outlying villages depended heavily on such a central city for their survival. Most of the commercial activity for the area occurred in the city. The major sanctuary or place of worship was located there. When enemies threatened, people in nearby villages fled to the walled city for protection.

(v. 6) Luz: In Genesis 28, Jacob renamed **Luz** (“almond tree”) to Bethel (“house of God.”) In describing the promised land allotment for Joseph's descendants, the inspired biblical writer distinguished between Bethel and Luz (Josh. 16:2). Thus, perhaps Bethel identified the specific place of worship, while Luz was a nearby city.

(v. 6) Canaan: This designation for the promised land occurs in the stories of the patriarchs as early as Genesis 11:31. The boundaries of the promised land appear to fluctuate throughout the Old Testament period. In Genesis 15:18-21 the Lord designated an extensive geographical area that He was giving to

Abram's offspring. Israel's basic land, however, normally extended from Dan to Beersheba (see 2 Sam. 24:2; 1 Kings 4:25).

Because of its strategic location, Canaan functioned as a land bridge between Asia and Africa. For ancient powers like Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, Canaan became a contested battlefield. The location remains one of the world's most politically sensitive areas.

(v. 7) El-Bethel: This place name means “God of Bethel” or “God of the house of God.” Jacob named the location in honor of the Lord who had previously appeared to him there (Gen. 28:13).

(v. 7) Revealed himself: The Hebrew verb translated **revealed** basically means “to uncover.” The verb frequently conveys the meaning of divine revelation. We cannot know God apart from His revelation of Himself. His supreme and final revelation has come in the Person of Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-4). Through the Bible, God has provided ongoing generations a source of knowledge about Himself and His Son.

(v. 8) Deborah: Serving as Rebekah's nurse, **Deborah** is mentioned, although not by name, in Genesis 24:59. She later became part of Jacob's household. She died and was buried near Bethel.

(v. 8) Allon-bacuth: The designation “oak of weeping” reveals the heartache Jacob experienced when the woman who had cared for him since childhood died.

Key Doctrine

God

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

EXPLORE Genesis 35:5-8



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can rest in knowing God provides for His people.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Genesis 35:5-8** as the group listens for how God protected Jacob and his family. Add the word “build” to the previously recorded verbs.

ASK: **How does obedience to God serve as a protection for the believer?** (PSG, p. 77)

SHARE: *The change of the city’s name from Luz to Bethel stressed the significance of the events in Jacob’s life. He recognized it as a holy place where God revealed Himself.*

READ: Reread Genesis 35:8. Acknowledge that this verse may seem out of place in this narrative. Explain that the deaths of Deborah and Isaac (Gen. 35:27-29) denote the passing of the previous generation.

TRANSITION: *Jacob heard the direction from God, returned to Bethel, and built an altar. From there, he was ready to hear from God again.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Physical

Prior to the session, gather a set of building blocks. Give two blocks to each person in the group. Instruct them to join another person to build a tower. After the tower is completed, ask the pair to name the tower after a special place or time in their spiritual life. Explain that Jacob built a marker to honor the place where God spoke to him. Discuss why it is important to remember places in our spiritual journey.

Renewed (Genesis 35:9-15)

9 God appeared to Jacob again after he returned from Paddan-aram, and he blessed him. **10** God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; you will no longer be named Jacob, but your name will be Israel.” So he named him Israel. **11** God also said to him, “I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation, indeed an assembly of nations, will come from you, and kings will descend from you. **12** I will give to you the land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac. And I will give the land to your future descendants.” **13** Then God withdrew from him at the place where he had spoken to him. **14** Jacob set up a marker at the place where he had spoken to him — a stone marker. He poured a drink offering on it and poured oil on it. **15** Jacob named the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

(v. 9) Paddan-aram: This place name may mean “way of Syria,” “field of Syria,” or “plow of Syria.” Terah, Abram’s father, moved his family from Ur of the Chaldeans to the city of Haran in Paddan-aram (Gen. 11:31-32). Abram journeyed from there to Canaan (12:1-7). Abraham later sent his chief servant to Syria to find a wife for Isaac (24:1-4). After stealing the blessing from Esau, Jacob fled to this land where he worked for his mother’s brother, Laban (28:5).



Bethel

Discover more about Bethel, the place where God confirmed His covenant with Jacob.

(v. 10) Named him Israel: God had changed Jacob’s name to **Israel** after his wrestling match in Genesis 32. The repetition in Genesis 35 reinforces his new name with a different emphasis. In chapter 32, the change from Jacob “the deceiver” to Israel “the one who prevails with God” called attention to God’s transformation of Jacob’s character. The context of Genesis 35 highlights the national and royal importance of the new name, Israel (see 35:11).

(v. 11) God Almighty: This Hebrew title is often transliterated as *El Shaddai* and can be interpreted as “God of the mountains.” God revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by this name (Ex. 6:3), typically in the context of the covenant (see Gen. 17:1-2). The title appears most frequently in the book of Job. It emphasizes God’s power and sufficiency.

(v. 11) Be fruitful and multiply: This command of God appears at significant junctures in Genesis. It is typically mentioned in the context of God’s blessing the command’s recipients. This directive initially occurs in the creation account (Gen. 1:22,28). The

phrase also appears again in God’s command to Noah’s family (9:1,7). God’s command to Jacob calls to mind the patriarchal blessing Isaac bestowed on his son when he sent him to Aram (28:1-5).

(v. 11) Assembly: The Hebrew term used here may denote a gathering of any kind or for any purpose. For example, it can designate congregating for evil purposes (“crowd” in Ps. 26:5) or for conducting civil affairs (Prov. 26:26). The term can also refer to an assembly for war (Judg. 20:2). It designates the group of returning exiles (Jer. 31:8) and the restored community in Jerusalem (Neh. 8:2).

However, the Hebrew word is used especially of an assembly for religious purposes. Moses referred to the Israelites’ gathering to receive the law at Mount Sinai as “the day of the assembly” (Deut. 9:10). Assemblies also occurred on other occasions for feasts and fast, as well as worship.

Key Word

Marker

The Hebrew term can also be rendered “pillar” or “monument.” The same term occurs in Genesis 35:20 to designate the memorial that Jacob set up at Rachel’s grave.

Such standing stone landmarks often had religious significance. They certainly did for Jacob when he consecrated his first marker at Bethel (28:16-22) and set another one when he returned in chapter 35. However, God commanded His people to destroy markers that had been set up to idols (Ex. 23:24).



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can live in light of God's promises.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Genesis 35:9-15** as the group listens to identify specific changes and charges that occur in these verses. Add the word "multiply" to the list of verbs.

ASK: **How do God's promises help a person understand His expectations for His people?** (PSG, p. 80)

ILLUSTRATE: Display both the black and white sheets of paper again, sharing that believers can move from darkness to a place of hope based on God's promises and protection. Share that the difference in Genesis 34 and Genesis 35 is the presence and promises of God.

TRANSITION: *A renewed commitment is evident in these verses. Jacob is now Israel, and Luz is now Bethel. From a place of darkness, Jacob found a new sense of hope in God's promises. Meanwhile, God continued his work in the lives of His people, moving them toward the ultimate fulfillment of His covenant.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Compare/Contrast

Read Genesis 17:1-6 and Genesis 35:9-15. Lead the group to note similarities and differences in the message Abraham received from God and the message Jacob received. Discuss the significance of "God Almighty." Relate that the verses have a national and a universal focus. Read Genesis 28:3. Highlight how the similarities in the passages reflect the ongoing covenant God had with His people. Note that Jacob was the next link in the chain of promises God made to Abraham and his descendants.

CHALLENGE

- SUMMARIZE:** Review these points from Apply the Text on page 81 of the *Personal Study Guide*:
- *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.*
- GUIDE:** Invite the group to share how these statements are supported by the Scripture verses read in this session. Direct the group's attention to the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 80). Briefly share a summary of the word "Christian," from a Bible dictionary. Explain that just as Jacob had a name change, believers in Christ's time had a name change. Group adults into teams of two to four people and examine the following Scriptures: Acts 11:26; 26:28; and 1 Peter 4:16.
- DISCUSS:** Point out the second set of questions on page 81 of the PSG. Briefly discuss the second set of questions.
- ASK:** **What steps can you take to guard yourself from idols?** (PSG, p. 81)
- PRAY:** Close in prayer thanking God for His presence and protection. Praise Him for the hope found in renewed commitments.

After the Session

Reinforce the session by encouraging the group to spend time reflecting on the hope found in Christ and praising Him for his faithfulness. Follow up with anyone in the group who missed the session. Send the group a text or an email highlighting Genesis 35:11. Share that this is the memory verse for this week. Encourage the group to work on memorizing the verse and asking God to help them see how His promise to Jacob relates to His promises to them.

ADULT COMMENTARY



Want to go deeper in your study?
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insights related to the key passages.
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