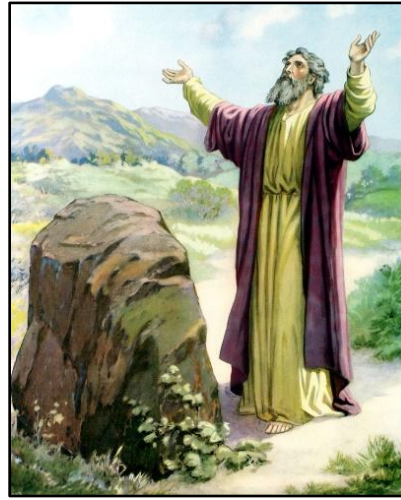


READ**Genesis 35:1-15****REFLECT****APPLY****RETURNING TO BETHEL**

The bruising events of Shechem prompted an intervention from God that guided Jacob and his family back into the pathway of God's blessing. It required him to go back to the place of his vow and rededicate himself to God.

BACK TO BETHEL v 1 – in ch 31, the Lord had spoken to Jacob and instructed him to return to the land of Canaan, and thus, through the transforming nature of his experience at Peniel, heal his damaged relationship with his brother, Esau. For a while though, he failed to live up to the new name given to him, choosing to dwell so near to Shechem that his vulnerable daughter and self-willed sons became caught up in its moral and spiritual chaos. Jacob needed spiritual renewal, and thus God called him to return to Bethel to dwell there and build an altar at the place of his first encounter with God. If we want the blessing of God, we need to dwell at 'Bethel' the 'House of God', adjusting our behaviour so that it is in keeping with our status as children of God, living as His beloved Bride within the courts of His house.



Have you ever rededicated yourself to God? What prompted you to do so?

In what way do we need to 'purify ourselves' in order to be ready to meet with the Lord? (1 John 3:1-6, Galatians 5:16-26)

OBEDIENCE AND CLEANSING v 2-5 – obediently reclaiming his spiritual lead Jacob gathered his family round him and instructed them all to put away the idols they had accumulated in Shechem's city, wash themselves and put on clean clothes. They were all going to make a new start, and needed to cleanse their thoughts and attitude to God. The idols of Shechem, and the associated ear-rings were removed, hidden and left behind and Jacob boldly led his tribe out of the grip of its sin. The fear he had felt after the violent revenge of his sons, was shielded by the 'terror of God' that fell upon the cities around.

BETHEL AND DEBORAH'S DEATH v 6-8 – finally returning to Bethel, accompanied by his wives, children, servants and livestock, Jacob built an altar to the 'God of Bethel' who had 'brought him again to his father's house in peace' (Gen. 28:21). His mother, Rebekah had said she would send for him when Esau's fury had abated, but we do not read of that happening. In fact, Rebekah is not mentioned again in scripture after her deceitful behaviour towards her husband and son. Her death is not recorded, except to acknowledge that she was buried in the cave of Macphelah (Gen. 49:31). Instead, it is her humble nurse, Deborah, who Jacob remembers, burying her body under the 'Tree of Weeping'. It is possible that she had gone to live with Jacob after Rebekah's death.

RENEWED PROMISE v 9-15 – having returned to the place of his vow, the Lord appeared to Jacob again, reaffirmed his name as 'Israel' and giving him the same promises that Abraham received before Isaac was born. Their fulfilment was completely dependent upon the Almighty power of God and His overruling Sovereign plan rather than Jacob's capacity to behave in a way that was God honouring. God's love for Jacob and his family never wavered, but Jacob had to learn through bitter experience, the responsibilities involved in serving Him. When we make mistakes in our spiritual life, we need to follow the example of Jacob and return to the cross of Christ, recommitting ourselves to His will and purpose for our life. Jacob erected another pillar of stone to commemorate his repentant change of heart and humbly worshipped God for His gracious overruling forgiveness and blessing.

What is involved in a repentant prayer for renewal? (Psalm 51)

*'Create in me a clean heart O God,
And renew a right spirit within me'.
Psalm 51:10*

READ

REFLECT

APPLY