

REFLECTION GUIDE

GENESIS 35:1-29 | ON THE ROAD AGAIN

KEY TERMS

Foreign gods - Before leaving Shechem and returning to Bethel, Jacob instructs his family to put away their *foreign gods* (v. 2). These items were most likely taken from the destruction of Shechem and include *earrings* (v. 4), which were likely associated with the worship of foreign gods.

El-bethel - Jacob returns to *Luz*, which he previously renamed *Bethel* ("house of God"), and now he calls the place *El-bethel*, meaning "The God of Bethel" (v. 7). The name emphasizes the presence of God himself over and above the physical land.

Drink offering - A drink offering was a common form of worship in the ancient world where someone would pour out a drink—usually wine—as a sign of devotion. This is the only example of a drink offering in Genesis but they would later become part of Israelite worship (see Ex 29:40-41).

BACKGROUND

While in Shechem, God tells Jacob to go to Bethel and *dwell* there (v. 1). Jacob obeys God and prepares his family to return to Bethel by asking them to *put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments* (v. 2). Jacob's instructions here seem to reveal an understanding that what happened in chapter 34 was unfitting for the people of God and that a change of course is necessary. While on their way to Bethel, God provides protection for Jacob and his family. Jacob's previous fear that the events in chapter 34 would lead to war against his family does not come to fruition (v. 5). After arriving in Bethel, Jacob renames the place a second time now calling it El-Bethel ("the God of Bethel"). At Bethel, God appears to Jacob yet again and re-issues Jacob's new name—Israel—and the promises to Jacob of *land* and *offspring* (vv. 9-15). Whereas the emphasis the first time God calls Jacob Israel seems to be on Jacob's personal transformation and individual blessing, the emphasis this time is on the *nations, kings, and offspring* that Israel will become. Jacob and his family then leave Bethel for *Ephrath* (or *Bethlehem*) and along the way Rachael dies giving birth to the family's final son (vv. 16-20). Rachel's name for this son was *Ben-oni*, meaning "son of my sorrow" but Jacob chooses to call him *Benjamin*, meaning "son of my right hand," which emphasizes Jacob's favor towards him (see Gen 42:4). Following Benjamin's birth, Jacob now has twelve sons who will become the twelve tribes of Israel (vv. 22-23). Jacob then finally returns home to his father Isaac and, after his death, Jacob and Esau bury their father together (v. 27-29).

GOING DEEPER

Jacob's life has been full of ups and downs, but he is finally back home in the promised land with his promised sons. What does Jacob's life say about the importance of perseverance in the spiritual life? Read Romans 5:3-5. What does Paul say about perseverance? How does God use lifelong faithfulness (even with our many moments of failures) to grow our faith?

DID YOU KNOW?

Although he plays a less significant role in the narrative of Genesis, Isaac's 180 years are more than his father Abraham and his son Jacob.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

GENESIS 35:1-28 | ON THE ROAD AGAIN

LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read Genesis 35:1-15. How does God intervene to call Jacob back to Bethel and invite him to dwell in fellowship with Himself? How is this intervention a beautiful evidence of God's grace?
2. What did Jacob instruct his household to do? Why is this an essential part of their preparation to dwell in fellowship with the Lord?
3. Throughout his life, how was Jacob fickle and fragile, up and down in his faith journey? How was God consistent and unchanging?

LIVING THE WORD

4. As you reflect on Jacob's messy life, how has our study grown your view of God's relentless grace? How has this encouraged you personally?
5. It's one thing to grasp the concept of God's grace. It's another thing to experience God's relentless grace firsthand. What keeps you from fully accepting God's grace in your life? What would you have to believe about God to trust his grace completely?
6. Is there anything that you need to "put away" (v. 2) as you seek to dwell in the presence of God? How does God's grace motivate you to cast aside anything that might hinder your relationship with God?
7. In your journey, how has the Lord been "the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone" (v. 3)? In other words, what situations have led to your experiencing God's presence and care in your life?

Practice this week: Close each day dwelling with God in prayer before bed: take 2-3 minutes to reflect on the day and to thank the Lord for his grace and his presence with you wherever you have gone.