

Bible Essentials

Scripture Passage: Genesis 35:1-20

As a group, share something about your past week. For example, share prayer requests and answers to prayer. Share the best and worst moments of your week (highs and lows). Write prayer requests here. Open with prayer for these requests and for God to open your hearts to this week's study.

Have you every clearly experienced God speaking to you or directing you? If so, what did he say, and what was the outcome?

Read today's passage. Discuss your initial impressions of the passage. Write any major points here.

Here is some context for Genesis 35:1-20.

A lot has happened since we last saw Jacob and his family in Genesis 30. After Jacob built up his flock, Laban's sons began to be jealous. They felt that Jacob had taken all of their wealth for himself. Laban had changed Jacob's wages multiple times, and no matter what the wages were, Jacob always got the better end of the deal. So the Lord told Jacob to go back to the land of his fathers. His wives agreed, and they set off without telling Laban.

Once Laban finds out, he pursues them, accusing Jacob of leaving without letting him say goodbye as well as stealing his idols. Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the idols, so he let Laban search for them. Rachel hid them, and Laban never found them. Laban and Jacob made a covenant to not harm each other, and Laban returned home.

Now Jacob has another obstacle—his brother Esau. They didn't leave on good terms, and Jacob is afraid that Esau will kill him as soon as they see each other. To try to prevent this, Jacob sends messengers ahead of him along with a gift. When Jacob hears that Esau is coming to meet him along with 400 men, Jacob prepares to be attacked and calls out to God to protect him. One night, Jacob wrestled with God, and God changed his name to Israel.

When the time finally came for Jacob to meet Esau, Jacob found something quite unexpected. Esau welcomed him with open arms! Once Jacob and Esau's relationship was restored, Jacob bought some land and settled there. Jacob's daughter Dinah ended up being raped by Shechem, one of the men that lived nearby. Dinah's brothers were furious, so when Shechem approached them and asked to marry Dinah, the brothers "agreed." They said they would give Dinah to Shechem to marry only if all the men were circumcised. Amazingly, all the men agreed. While they were still in pain from the procedure, Jacob's sons attacked them, killed them, and looted all their wealth. Because of this, Jacob was afraid that others would attack him, so he set out to move his family again.

What are your thoughts about the context? Discuss the context as a group. Write some key points here.

Read the passage again. Use a different Bible version if you have one available. Have someone summarize the passage in their own words, and use this space to record that summary.

Look closely at the passage and answer the following questions as a group. Write notes in the space provided.

What does the passage say about God?

What does the passage say about people?

What does the passage say about God's plan?

What else strikes you about this passage?

Understanding how a passage fits into the overarching story of the Bible is important.

When God confirms his promise to Jacob, he promises three things: God will make him into a nation, kings will be among Jacob's descendants, and God will give the land to Jacob's descendants. Throughout the rest of Genesis and into Exodus, we see that God fulfills the first part of this promise. Jacob's descendants became numerous and grew into a large nation. The nation was so large that they split it into a community of nations—the 12 tribes of Israel.

Then primarily in Joshua and Judges, we see God fulfill the third part of the promise. After God leads the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, he leads them to the Promised Land, this land that he declared would belong to Jacob's descendants. Joshua leads the Israelites to conquer the people in the land so that they can take possession of it as their own.

Later in the books of Samuel and Kings and beyond, we see God fulfill the second part of the promise. God sets up kings to rule over the Israelites, including Saul, David, Solomon, and many more. Some of these kings were good and led the people to follow God. Others were bad and led the people away from God and to foreign idols. But through it all, God brings one final King—Jesus. Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords, and he rules over all creation for all eternity.

What are your thoughts on how this passage fits into the overarching story of the Bible? Discuss as a group. What questions do you have individually or as a group? Discuss potential answers.

As a group, use the following questions to apply today's Scripture passage to your life.

How does this passage affect how you view God?

How does this passage affect how you view yourself?

How does this passage affect how you will live your life?

Close in prayer, asking God to help you apply what you learned today.