

Two Year Bible Trek  
Week 4  
Genesis 32-41

**Key Concepts:** The key concepts to watch for are the humanness of God's people, the renewal of the Covenant through Jacob (who becomes Israel...twice), the relinquishing of foreign gods and God's continuing providence and protection.

**Stories:** This section offers us a wide variety of stories including Jacob being renamed Israel and then safely returning to the land, the rape of his daughter Dinah, the murder of the men of Shechem by two of Jacob's sons, travels to Bethel, the removal of foreign gods, a second renaming of Jacob as Israel, the renewal of the covenant, the birth of Benjamin and the death of Rachael, the twelve sons are named, a long list of Esau's descendants, Joseph, his dreams and the beginning of his captivity, Judah sleeping with his daughter-in-law Tamar, and finally the initial cycle of Joseph stories in which he is sent to prison, interprets dreams, is brought to Pharaoh, given power second only to Pharaoh and then helps to insure that the people have enough to eat.

**Brief Summary of Stories:** We begin our section with the blessing and promise once again in danger. While Jacob has escaped Laban, he now has to face his older brother, who years earlier had pledged to kill him. As Jacob is waiting to discover his fate he encounters and wrestles with God. God renames him Israel (hence the name of the nation) which means one who strives with God. Jacob is very careful in his encounter with Esau and though warmly welcomed sets up his family at a safe distance. We witness brutality in the rape of Jacob's daughter and the subsequent murder of the rapist and his male relatives by two of Jacob's sons. The end result is that Jacob becomes wealthier (this is the blessing continued) because he and his family take the livestock of those they had killed.

Leaving the area under the protection of God, Jacob's clan moves to Bethel which will later become an important center of worship. Along the way Jacob's clan rids themselves of all their foreign gods in order to follow YHWHY alone. This is followed by a second naming and the renewal of the covenant. These are critical turning points in the story because Jacob now has a single God. Next we meet the twelve sons of Jacob (from which will come the twelve tribes of Israel) and are offered a look at the lineage of Esau, which again speaks to the blessing of God toward those related to Abraham.

We now enter the Joseph story, with one brief excursus. The brief excursus is a strange story about Judah, a son of Jacob, having sex with his daughter-in-law who has dressed up as a prostitute. It is a fascinating look at the customs and obligations expected of families.

The Joseph stories begin with the clear understanding that Joseph is different. He has the ability to interpret dreams given by God. This makes him a character unlike his brothers who are much more earthy and brutal. Ultimately jealousy gets the best of the brothers who want to get rid of him. The story at that point is murky. We are not sure who does what (take note of all of the characters involved in Joseph's getting to Egypt) but what we do know is that Joseph ends up in Egypt. In Egypt he is the perfect gentleman as well as the interpreter of dreams. These abilities ultimately bring him to the attention of Pharaoh, for whom Joseph will work. This section ends on a note of hope because God through Joseph has insured that there will be enough for all to eat.

1. What lesson about power do you take away from the stories of Dinah and Tamar?
2. How important is Jacob's decision to get rid of the family gods? Why would this be unusual?
3. What do you make of the Bible including the list of Esau's descendants?
4. How would you explain the two stories of Israel's renaming and the confusion about who actually sells Joseph into slavery?