

## 10 • The Beginning of Israel

As Jacob makes his way back to the land of Canaan, he sends messengers to Esau his brother. The messengers return with news that Esau “is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him” (32:6). Greatly afraid and distressed, notice how Jacob prays:

“O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,’ I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. But you said, ‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’” (32:9-12)

That same night, as Jacob was all alone, “a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.”

When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob’s hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, “Let me go, for the day has broken.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” Then he said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel (*he strives with God*), for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.” Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him. (32:25-29)

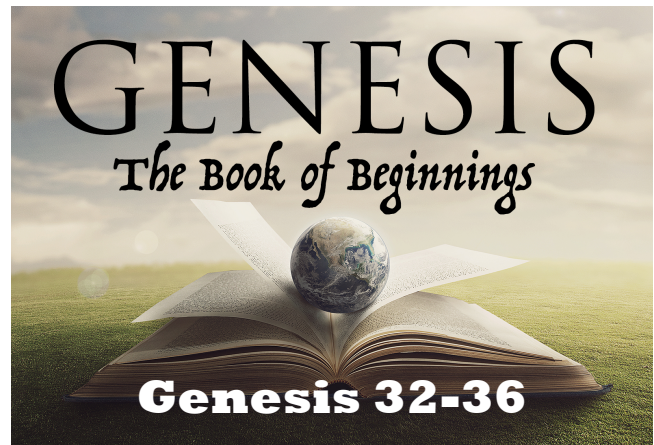


The next day, Esau was approaching and Jacob feared the worst. But how surprising when Esau ran to meet him, embraced him, fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept together! So Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem in the land of Canaan. In fact, he bought a piece of land for a hundred pieces of silver, erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel, which means God, the God of Israel (33:18-20).

In [Genesis 35](#), the LORD said to Jacob, “Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau” (28:18-22). Once again, God appears to Jacob and blesses him.

“Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.” So he called his name Israel. And God said to him, “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you.” (35:10-12)

On the journey from Bethel, Jacob’s wife Rachel went into labor—hard labor. As she was dying, she called the name of her newborn son Ben-oni (*son of my sorrow*). Jacob ended up calling him Benjamin (*son of the right hand*). “Now the sons of Jacob were twelve” (35:22).



## For Class & Family Discussion:

- Take a moment to remember: prior to [Genesis 32](#), what was Jacob's last interaction with Esau like?
- What happens in [32:22-32](#), and how does it seem to fundamentally change Jacob?
- Let's take a moment to reflect on the meaning of Israel—*he strives with God*. What do you make of that? Why would God give *this* name?
- Is there anything we can learn from the way Esau receives Jacob in [Genesis 33](#)?
- What do you notice about the way Jacob talks in [33:5](#)? How is this “cheater” continuing to grow and mature?
- And what is the significance of what we read in [33:20](#)? What does El-Elohe-Israel mean? And what does the name of this altar reveal about Jacob?
- [Genesis 34](#) is a difficult chapter to read for several reasons. What should we make of what is recorded there?
- Why do you think Jacob told his household to put away the foreign gods that were among them after hearing God's call in [35:1-4](#)?
- What is God doing in [35:9-15](#)?
- Why are we told what we are told in [35:22](#)? [Genesis 49:3-4](#) may prove to be helpful here...
- Why is the information contained in [Genesis 36](#) worthy of note? Where else do we run across these “Edomites” in Scripture?