

The Divine Name Changer

“²⁶And he said, Let me go, for the day breaks. And he said, I will not let you go, except you bless me.

²⁷And he said unto him, What is your name? And he said, Jacob.

²⁸And he said, Your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince you have power with God and with men, and have prevailed.” - Genesis 32:26-28

What’s In a Name?

The name Jacob sounds like the Hebrew word for heel, it literally means “heel catcher”. It was given to him because he was grasping at his twin brother Esau’s heel when they were born (Gen. 25:26). Jacob lived up to the reputation of his name, continually trying to catch at the heel of his brother in order that he may supplant/deceive him into relinquishing his blessing.

After Jacob’s intense encounter with Jesus at Mahanaim (Gen.32:24-32), Jesus gave Jacob a new name, one that was no longer reflective of fleshly living, rather, “Israel” a name fitting of a holy calling through divine grace.

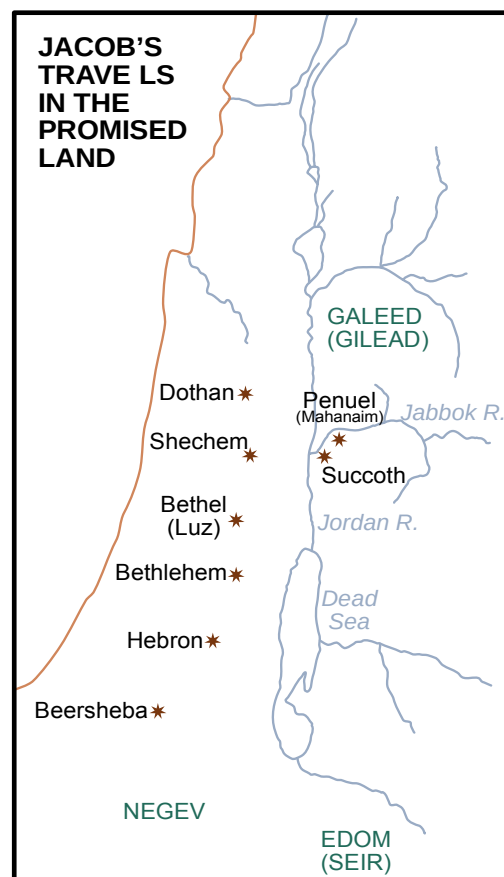
Israel means “Prince with God” and is derived from the two Hebrew root words:

- “Sar” which means prince/to rule/chief and
- “El”, an abbreviation of Elohim (the name of the Triune God).

The name Israel is God’s permanent testimony to the character and power Jacob had in Him. The name Israel would pass on to the descendants of Jacob, as they too were subjects of God’s divine favour (Ex. 19:5-6).

Entry Into the Land of Promise

- 20 years had past since Jacob fled from his brother Esau, before returning to the land of promise.
- After encountering Esau, Jacob set up camp on the border of the promise land in the city of Succoth (the word Succoth means booths).
- Jacob moved his family to the city of Shechem, some 17.5 miles west of Succoth. Between the time Jacob spent in Succoth and Shechem, 10 years had past.
- It is in the region of Shechem that he purchases land that becomes the inheritance of his son Joseph (Gen. 33:18, Josh 24:32).
- Jacob’s famous well is dug just outside Shechem in what is today Samaria (John 4:6).



Israel's Bittersweet Relationship with the City of Shechem

- Home to the wicked Canaanite tribe the Hivites
- First city Abraham built an altar to Yahweh when he entered the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:6)
- Where Jacob set up an altar to God (Gen. 33:20)
- The city where the Israelites had twice renewed their covenant with Yahweh after they entered the land (Josh. 8; 24)
- Situated in between Mt Gerizim (stood for God's blessing) and Mt Ebal (stood for cursing) (Deut 11:29, Deut. 27; 28)
- Where Abimelech (Gideon's son to his Shechemite concubine) lived and led a revolt against the sons of Gideon and Israel (Judg. 9)
- A central site of Baal worship (Judg. 9:46)
- Where Jeroboam (the first king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel) ruled from (1 Kings 12:25-27). The city of Samaria later was built approximately 7 miles from Shechem (1 Kings 16:24), which, became a central site during the period of the divided kingdom of Israel's apostasy and idolatry (1 Kings 16:32, Hos. 8:5-6, Amos 3:12-15, 6:1-6 & Mic. 1:5-7).

The Tragic Events of Shechem

- God's covenant family fellowship with pagans. In the words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian church ³³*Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."* - I Corinthians 15:33
- Dinah the daughter of Leah and Jacob is raped by the prince of the land Shechem, the son of Hamor (Gen. 34:2).
- Hamor goes to Jacob, seeking Dinah as a wife for his son Shechem (Gen. 34:5-6).
- Dinah's brothers Simeon and Levi sought vengeance on the Shechemites and placed a bride's price of circumcision (God's holy sign of the Abrahamic covenant) on all the men of Shechem (Gen. 34:13-15)
- On the third day post circumcision, Simeon and Levi waged a two-man war of revenge on the Shechemites, killing all the men, rescuing Dinah, and taking the women and wealth of the city as spoils (Gen. 34:25-29).
- Jacob now lives in fear of retaliation from the surrounding Canaanite tribes (Gen. 34:30).

Key Thinking Points:

Why did Jacob settle in the pagan city of Shechem?

Why did he allow the sign of the covenant to be taken by pagans?

Why didn't he at any point take control of the situation as the leader of his household?

Where had Israel gone?!?

A Call to Holy Living

- God calls Jacob to fulfil his vow to make an altar to the Lord at Bethel (Gen. 28:18-22, Gen.35:1).
- Jacob instructs his family to put away their foreign gods and to purify themselves (Gen. 35:2). Idolatry and apostasy is the result when believers fellowship with unbelievers (II Corinthians 6:14).
- God reinstates Jacob with the name Israel; Prince with God, and reaffirms the promise He made with Jacob 30 years earlier at Bethel (Gen. 35:10-12).

The Message for the Church

- You have been grafted into Israel (Rom. 11:11-24)
- You are an heir of God, co-heir with Christ (Rom. 8:15-17)
- As with Jacob, God has graciously bestowed on you a royal title through the redemptive work of Jesus. However, like Jacob, we can live in the flesh and not by the position we have been given in Christ Jesus.
- The strongest incentive to holy living is the comprehension of our holy calling.

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called – Ephesians 4:1