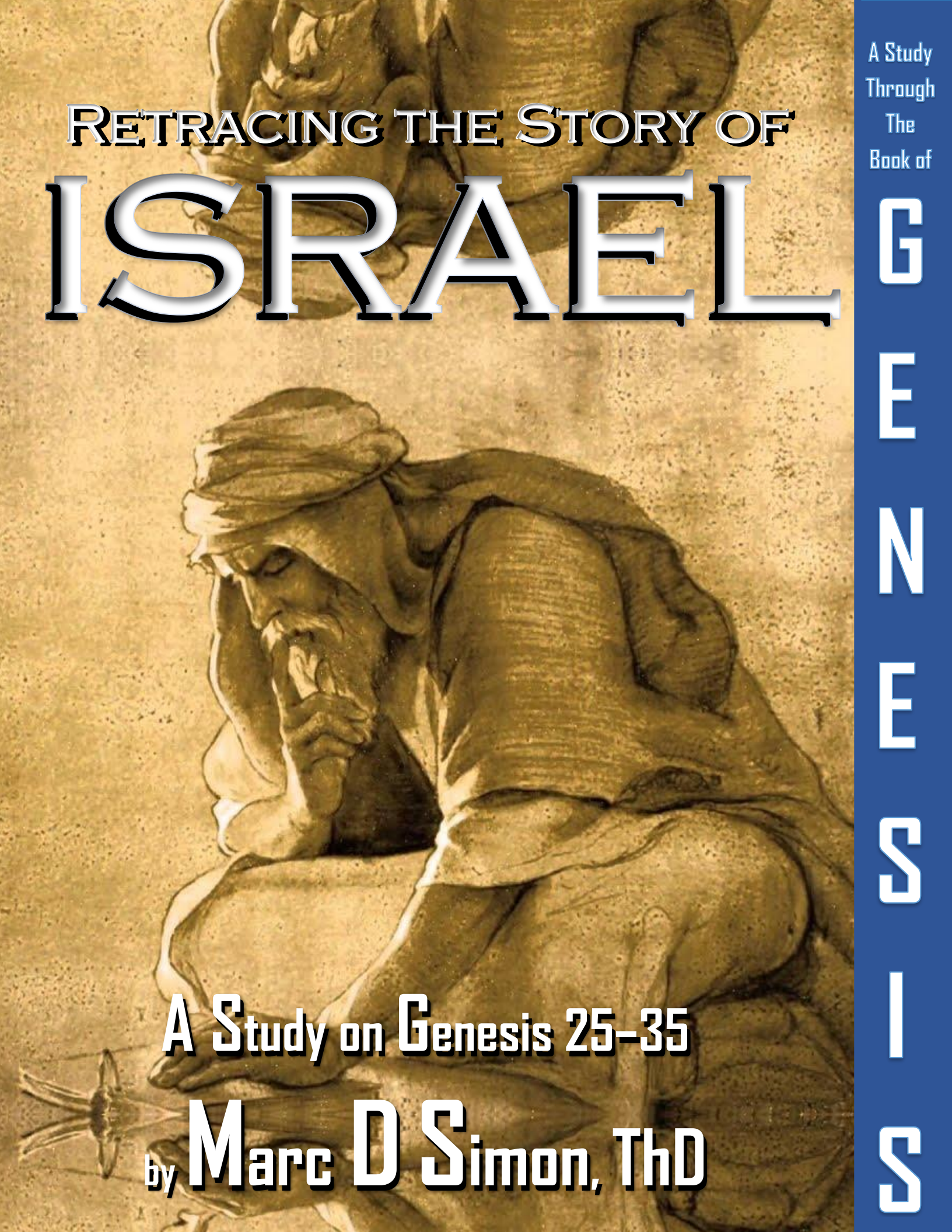




RETRACING THE STORY OF ISRAEL

A Study
Through
The
Book of

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A Study on Genesis 25–35

by **Marc D Simon, ThD**

Who is Jacob?

יַעֲקֹב

(Ya'ah'kohv)

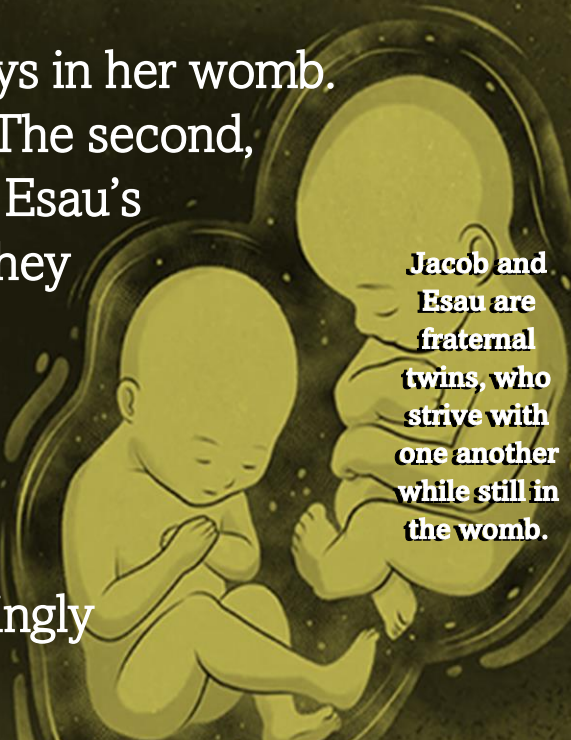
One of the most important figures in **Genesis** is **Jacob**, the son of **Isaac** and **Rebecca**, and grandson of **Abraham**. In Genesis, Jacob (who is later called “**Israel**”) fathers twelve sons who also become the **Twelve Tribes of Israel**.

Jacob is first introduced to us in Genesis 25. In the chapter, Isaac’s wife **Rebecca** is having trouble in her pregnancy and is told by God:

“There are two nations in your womb, and two kinds of people will be separated from within you; one will be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.” (Genesis 25:23)

When she finally gives birth there are twin boys in her womb. The first, **Esau**, is covered with hair and red. The second, however, comes out of the womb grasping at Esau’s *aqêv*, which means “**heel**.” Because of this, they name the child *Yaaqōv* (or “**Jacob**”), which basically means “**heel taker**” (or “*deceiver*”).

As the children grow, Esau becomes a skillful hunter, while Jacob remains at home among the tents. Over time their father Isaac increasingly favors Esau, while Rebekah favors Jacob.



Jacob and Esau are fraternal twins, who strive with one another while still in the womb.

The Deceiver (Genesis 27:1–28:9)

With Jacob's tendency to "grab the heel" of others now established, the next thing we find him doing is taking advantage of his brother's hunger in order to "grab" his birthright from him. It is from a place of hunger that Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for a meal (Gen. 25:29–34). As one commentator writes:

"Jacob has a sharp mind but no conscience, while Esau is all belly with no brain."

Having now secured the birthright of the firstborn, Jacob conspires with his mother to take advantage of his father's failing vision, and secure the blessing of the firstborn as well.



He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished." But Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." (Genesis 25:30–31)

Through deceit, he steals the paternal blessing due his brother. This is the very blessing which confers the Abrahamic calling carried by Isaac to his next son.

When Esau discovers Jacob's treachery, he vows to kill him, so Jacob leaves home and flees to Haran, which is ironically the very land from which God had first called Abraham years before, *cf. Gen. 12:4*.

Dreaming at Bethel (Genesis 28:10–22)

Just as God had spoken to Abraham before his journey, He now speaks to Jacob before his. In both cases God promises to give them **descendants, blessing, and land**.

“As he slept, he dreamed of a stairway that reached from the earth up to heaven. And he saw the angels of God ascending and descending on the stairway. At the top of the stairway was the LORD, and He said, “I AM the LORD, the God of your father Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I AM giving it to you and your offspring. And your offspring will be as numerous as the dust of the earth itself! They will spread out in directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all families of the earth will be blessed through you...” (Genesis 28:12–15)



When Jacob awakes from his dream, he names the place he is in **Bethel** (which means “**house of God**”).

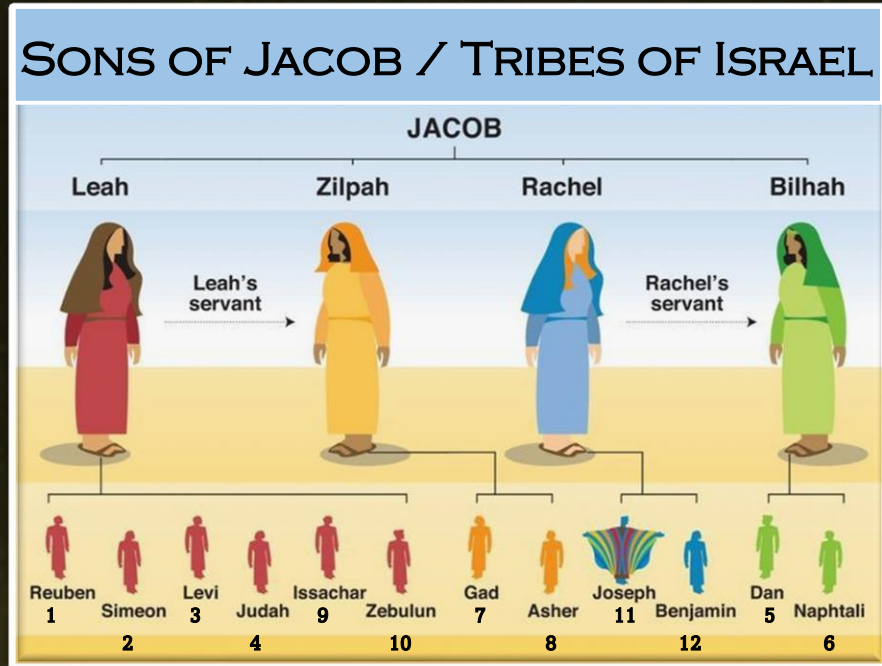
He then tells God that if He will protect him on his journey and bring him safely back to his father’s house, that he will worship Him alone, and tithe to Him from everything he has. His vow to tithe marks his own realization that whatever good he receives on his journey is really a gift to him from God.

In the Land of Haran (Genesis 29–31)

Jacob eventually arrives in Haran, the ancient city where Abraham was first called by God. While there, he marries Leah and Rachel, the daughters of his uncle Laban, has 11 sons and one daughter, and becomes exceptionally wealthy.

Despite his success, Jacob quickly finds himself on the receiving end of his uncle's manipulation and deceit.

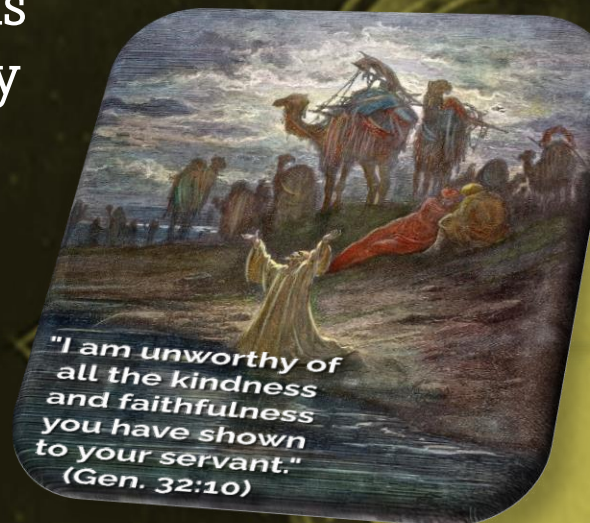
When he finally manages to separate from his uncle a great drama unfolds between them, with both men ultimately entering into a covenant agreement to not harm the other.



Your Name Shall Be Called Israel (Genesis 32–33)

As Jacob prepares to return home and face his brother Esau, he prays to God for protection, confessing his unworthiness in a manner that is strangely uncharacteristic of the Jacob we have known up until now (Gen. 32:10).

Apparently, Jacob has now learned for himself what Abraham had learned before him: **That God's blessing is a gift!**





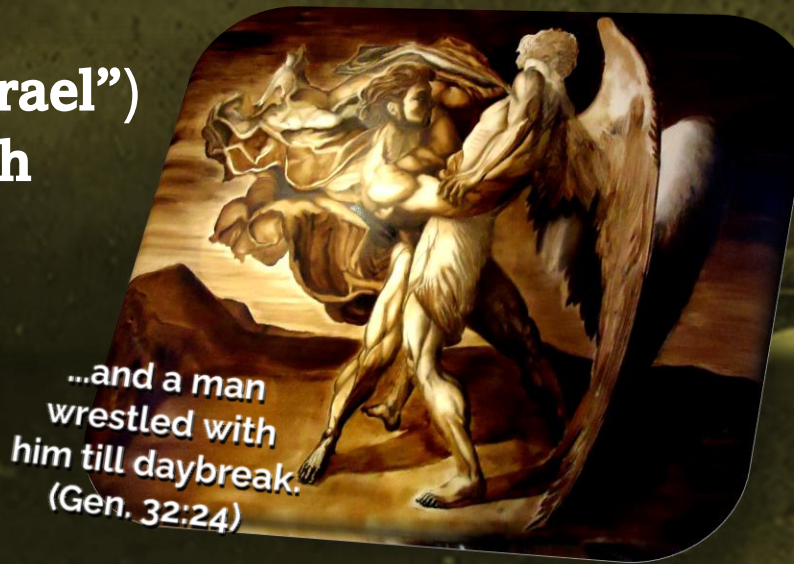
At some point in his journey, Jacob sends his family and possessions across a river called **Jabbok** (Gen. 32:22–23), and begins wrestling with a mysterious opponent who comes out of nowhere to challenge him.

But who is it that Jacob wrestles with in the desert? While Genesis calls him “**a man**” (Gen. 32:24), and the prophet Hosea calls him an “**angel**” (Hos. 12:4), Jacob himself refers to Him as “**God**” (Gen. 32:30).

Either way, his opponent ultimately blesses Jacob, but only after wounding him first. And though Jacob is told that he has now “**overcome**” with God and man, his limp is forever a reminder of who was truly the stronger opponent.

When Jacob receives a new name from his opponent it is a further proof that he has encountered someone greater than himself—*someone divine*.

The new name given to him (“**Israel**”) means “**one who struggles with God**,” which is ironic because in some sense the history of the nation birthed from him will be a history of their own struggle with God as well.



Perhaps the biggest takeaway from looking at Jacob’s life is in realizing that God’s choice of Jacob over his brother Esau was NEVER about Jacob’s superiority or goodness, but about God’s **grace** and **sovereign choice**.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER!

The story of Jacob is a story of God's faithfulness. Through it, God shows us that even when we come up the wrong way, or make poor decisions, He can still use us.

In Jacob's case, many of his battles in life began before he was even born. He is described as wrestling in the womb, and this "must-win" mentality apparently follows him into life. From his brother to his father, uncle, and even his wives, Jacob deceives everyone in order to win.

When God finally gets a hold of him, Jacob is given a new name, which equates to a new identity in God. He is no longer a "heel taker," but a new creation.

Like Jacob, we may each wrestle with God in our own way. Some of us run from His call, only to find ourselves wounded in the process. These wounds, however, if we are honest, are often the catalyst for the most lasting changes in our lives.

We wrestle until we find ourselves wounded, and yet somehow blessed!

And this is the story of Israel!

Much Grace and Peace!

– Pastor Marc

