

A Rood Awakening!

Presents

Awakening in the Word

By Glenn McWilliams of TK TORAH KEEPERS
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THE OVERVIEW

In our previous portion Jacob finally severed his family ties with Laban, Haran, and the culture of Mesopotamia. Leaving the confines of his family's history behind him, Jacob heads for home. Having mustered the courage to confront Laban concerning his deceptive ways, Jacob must now face the possibility of a similar confrontation because of the seeds of deceit which he planted before his journey into exile. At the very heart of this portion is Jacob's wrestling with the Sovereign One, with Esau, and most importantly, maybe with himself. There is much wisdom to be learned from our father Jacob, who now prepares himself to face a brand new day.

THE OUTLINE

Our portion may be broken down into three major sections, the first with its own subsections.

- Genesis 32:4-24 Jacob makes preparations for meeting Esau
 - Genesis 32:4-6 Jacob sends messengers
 - Genesis 32:7-8 Jacob divides the camp
 - Genesis 32:9-12 Jacob prays
 - Genesis 32:13-21 Jacob sends a gift to Esau
 - Genesis 32:22-24 Jacob prepares his family
- Genesis 32:25-33 Jacob's wrestling
- Genesis 33:1-16 Jacob encounters Esau
- Genesis 33:17 Jacob journeys to Succoth

SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What biblical principle is at play in this story?
2. Does Jacob command the "angels"?
3. What is the meaning of the name of this place?
4. What does Jacob fear?
5. What can we learn from Jacob's actions in this matter?
6. What is the model of Jacob's prayer?
7. With whom does Jacob wrestle?
8. What is the meaning of this story?
9. What is touched?
10. What is prohibited?
11. What is the blessing?
12. What changes about Jacob?
13. What is the meaning of the name Israel?
14. What is the outcome with Esau?

THE TEXT

Genesis 32:4-33:17 And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: ⁵and I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight. ⁶And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. ⁷Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; ⁸and said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape. ⁹And Jacob said, O Elohim of my father Abraham, and Elohim of my father Isaac, YHWH which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: ¹⁰I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. ¹¹Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. ¹²And Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude. ¹³And he lodged there that same night; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother; ¹⁴two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes, and twenty rams, ¹⁵thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals. ¹⁶And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove. ¹⁷And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? And whither goest thou? And whose are these before thee? ¹⁸Then thou shalt say, They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, also he is behind us. ¹⁹And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him. ²⁰And say ye moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me. ²¹So went the present over before him: and himself lodged that night in the company. ²²And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. ²³And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had. ²⁴And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

²⁵And when He saw that He prevailed not against him, He touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as He wrestled with him. ²⁶And He said, Let Me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me. ²⁷And He said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. ²⁸And He said, Thy name shall be

called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with Elohim and with men, and hast prevailed. ²⁹And Jacob asked Him, and said, Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name. And He said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after My name? And He blessed him there. ³⁰And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen Elohim face to face, and my life is preserved. ³¹And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh. ³²Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because He touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.

^{33:1}And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. ²And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost. ³And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. ⁴And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept. ⁵And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, Who are those with thee? And he said, The children which Elohim hath graciously given thy servant. ⁶Then the handmaidens came near, they and their children, and they bowed themselves. ⁷And Leah also with her children came near, and bowed themselves: and after came Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed themselves. ⁸And he said, What meanest thou by all this drove which I met? And he said, These are to find grace in the sight of my lord. ⁹And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself. ¹⁰And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of Elohim, and thou wast pleased with me. ¹¹Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because Elohim hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough. And he urged him, and he took it. ¹²And he said, Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee. ¹³And he said unto him, My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die. ¹⁴Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure, until I come unto my lord unto Seir. ¹⁵And Esau said, Let me now leave with thee some of the folk that are with me. And he said, What needeth it? Let me find grace in the sight of my lord. ¹⁶So Esau returned that day on his way unto Seir. ¹⁷And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

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My friend and brother Bradford Scott¹ teaches that most Hebrew words and concepts are connected to and derived from a simple picture of a family, a house, and a piece of land. This is certainly true in the principle of seedtime and harvest. The apostle Shaul instructs us in the very simple, yet profound biblical principle of sowing and reaping.

Galatians 6:7-8 *Be not deceived; Elohim is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. ⁸For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*

Yeshua likewise teaches this principle in a somewhat different way.

Matthew 7:16-20 *Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? ¹⁷Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. ²⁰Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*

The Torah instructs us that everything in creation brings forth after its kind.

Genesis 1:11-12 *And Elohim said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. ¹²And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and Elohim saw that it was good.*

Clearly the Torah, Yeshua, and Shaul all confirm that we shall reap what we have sown. If we have sown wheat, we shall reap wheat; if we have sown grapes, we shall reap grapes; if we have sown to our spirit, we shall reap from the spirit. The converse of this principle is also true. If we have sown weeds and thorns, we shall reap weeds and thorns. It may also be said that if we have sown deceit, we may expect to reap deception; and if we have sown animosity and enmity with our brother, we shall also reap animosity and enmity from our brother.

In many ways this biblical principle of sowing and reaping is illustrated in the life of our father Jacob. Having just separated himself from the deceptive and dangerous snares and practices of Laban in the land of Haran, Jacob must now face a harvest of threats and dangers from the seeds of deception that he himself planted in the land of Canaan before his departure. It has been at least twenty years since Jacob escaped the threatening cries of his brother Esau.

¹ www.wildbranch.org

Genesis 27:35-36 *And he said, Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing. ³⁶And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? For he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?*

Genesis 27:41 *And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob.*

Esau's threats of revenge and death are the fruit of the seeds that Jacob planted through his acts of cleverness and deception. Now, as Jacob seeks to escape Laban's threats and return home to the land of his inheritance, he is halted along the way by the fear and anxiety evoked by his own past planting.

Our portion this week may easily be divided into three major sections. The first section details Jacob's preparation and prayer for his encounter with the unknown disposition of his brother Esau. The third section of the portion recounts the dialogue and details of the uneasy reunion of these two very different brothers. At the heart of our portion is the wrestling match, which leaves us wrestling with a number of very critical questions. In last week's portion we talked of Jacob cutting the umbilical cord with Mesopotamia and Israel becoming its own house, people, and nation. In this week's portion we witness this infant people facing its first struggle to live.

Before we delve into the heart of our portion, let us return to the conclusion of the previous portion to address a couple of significant issues that we did not address last week. These issues will have an effect upon our portion this week.

Genesis 32:1-3 *And Jacob went on his way, and the **angels of Elohim** met him. ²And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is Elohim's host: and he called the **name of that place Mahanaim**. ³And Jacob sent messengers before him to **Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom**.*

The Hebrew words *mal'ach* (*mem, lammed, aleph, khaf*) in the singular and *malachim* (*mem, lammed, aleph, khaf, yud, mem*) in the plural are the words for "messenger" and "messengers." Unfortunately, these Hebrew words are often translated by the Greek word *aggelos* (*alpha, gamma, gamma, epsilon, lambda, omicron, sigma*), which is then transliterated into the English language as "angel" or "angels." In English the word "angel" carries with it connotations of divine or spiritual winged beings which live in the heavens and carry out the will of the Sovereign One. Such spiritual beings that refuse to obey the will of the Sovereign One are often described as "demons" or "fallen angels." Any such sense of a developed angelology is absent from the writings of the Torah. It would not be until the Babylonian captivity and Israel's incorporation of the pollution of Zoroastrianism that a developed "angelology and demonology" would enter the worldview of the children of Israel. In both the Torah and the pre-exilic writings of the Tanach the definition and nature of angels or *malachim* are left ambiguous at best. In most instances of human/*malachim* interactions, it is unclear whether these "messengers" are mere men, divine beings, or even the manifest presence of the Holy One Himself. Let us look at three such examples.

The first example of ambiguity concerning the word *malachim* is in the story of the visitors that came to visit Abraham in Mamre and Lot in Sodom. We are told that YHWH appears to Abraham in the plains of Mamre and that suddenly, three men appear.

Genesis 18:1-3 *And YHWH appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; ²and he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, ³and said, Adonai, if now I have found favour in Thy sight, pass not away, I pray Thee, from Thy servant.*

It is unclear in this passage whether verse 1 is meant to serve as an announcement of the three men, one of which is YHWH, or whether the visit of the three men is an interruption of the appearance of YHWH to

Abraham. Adding to the ambiguity is the fact that the text uses the Hebrew word *enosh* (*aleph, nun, vav, shin*), which means "mortal." It would appear from this word choice that the visitors are indeed mortal men, but this may simply be a literary device to help us relate to Abraham's understanding and confusion. With this said, however, we should note that Abraham calls one of the visitors "Adonai" in a form that is always used of YHWH. After this initial conversation, Abraham shows great hospitality to the three visitors by preparing a meal for them. Confirming the reality of these visitors is the fact that they actually eat the meal, thus proving that they are not merely phantasms. Here we may recall the story of the resurrected Messiah, who ate in front of his disciples to confirm the reality of his presence, teaching the disciples that he was real and not merely a ghost or figment of their imaginations.

Luke 24:40-43 *And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? ⁴²And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. ⁴³And he took it, and did eat before them.*

So it is in the story of Abraham that the visitors are clearly real. But what they are is yet to be seen. After the meal we witness Abraham in a drawn out prayer of intercession with one of the visitors. Abraham clearly addresses the visitor in the second person as though he were talking with the Sovereign One and not to a messenger, a prophet, or a man.

Genesis 18:23 *And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?*

In this dialogue we also witness the Sovereign One answering Abraham. Whether He speaks directly or through a messenger, we cannot tell.

Genesis 18:26 *And YHWH said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.*

Later in the narrative two of the visitors journey to Sodom to visit Lot. Lot welcomes these messengers into his home. Again, we must assume that to Lot, they appear to be just ordinary men to whom he feels compelled to show hospitality. But when the men of the town attempt to take Lot's visitors by force, the visitors smite the men of the town with blindness, indicating that they are somehow more than mere mortals.

Genesis 19:11 *And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door.*

Clearly at this point we must question what manner of men these are that can perform such wonders. Before we go too far in our thinking, however, let us remember that Elijah, Elisha, and Yeshua, all of whom were men, likewise performed powerful miracles by the power of the Spirit of the Holy One poured out upon them. In other words, we must be careful not to equate the means of the miracles with the agents of the miracles. Thus, we see that Abraham and Lot had difficulty discerning the nature of the visitors. While it is possible that these visitors were supernatural beings, it is also possible to say that they were merely manifestations of the ubiquitous Holy One or that they were Spirit-filled, mortal prophets.

A second such ambiguous story is found in the book of Judges. Manoah is a Danite whose wife is barren. The angel of YHWH appears unto the woman and reveals to her that she will indeed conceive and bear a son and that he is to be a Nazarite. When she reports the story to her husband, it becomes ambiguous as to whether she saw her visitor as the angel of YHWH or simply a man of Elohim.

Judges 13:3 *And the angel of YHWH appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.*

Judges 13:6 *Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of Elohim came unto me, and His countenance was like the countenance of an angel of Elohim, very terrible: but I asked Him not whence He was, neither told He me His name.*

After hearing the account from his wife, Manoah prays to YHWH to send the man of Elohim back to them that He may teach them concerning the child.

Judges 13:8 *Then Manoah intreated YHWH, and said, O Adonai, let the man of Elohim which Thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.*

After this second encounter with the messenger, it becomes clear that He is no mere mortal.

Judges 13:15-21 *And Manoah said unto the angel of YHWH, I pray thee, let us detain Thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for Thee. ¹⁶And the angel of YHWH said unto Manoah, Though thou detain Me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto YHWH. For Manoah knew not that He was an angel of YHWH. ¹⁷And Manoah said unto the angel of YHWH, What is Thy name, that when Thy sayings come to pass we may do Thee honour? ¹⁸And the angel of YHWH said unto him, Why askest thou thus after My name, seeing it is secret? ¹⁹So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto YHWH: and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. ²⁰For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of YHWH ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground. ²¹But the angel of YHWH did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that He was an angel of YHWH.*

Again, it is ambiguous as to what or who this messenger of YHWH is. Is it an angel, a man, or a manifestation of the Holy One Himself? The ambiguity in this story is clearly intentional and is used to demonstrate our vulnerability to surprise by the Holy One. This brings to mind the words of the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 13:2 *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*

The final story of ambiguity, which I will address later in the portion, is the story of Jacob wrestling a man. For now, however, let it suffice to say that there is ambiguity in the Torah concerning the nature of these visitors.

At the end of last week's portion we were told that "messengers" of Elohim came to Jacob on the way to Seir. That Jacob was not shocked by such a visitation should not surprise us. We may recall that Jacob witnessed the ascending and descending of such "messengers" in his dream at Bethel.

Genesis 28:12 *And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of Elohim ascending and descending on it.*

Again, we should not jump to conclusions concerning these ascending and descending messengers. First, we should remember that they were seen in a dream. Second, we should remember that what Jacob was picturing was possibly a ziggurat with a long set of stairs ascending to the top. It would not be uncommon to see mortal men serving as priests ascending and descending upon these stairs. Again, there is ambiguity.

The point I want to make is that these "messengers of Elohim" which meet Jacob on the way to Seir may indeed be divine beings. However, we should not confuse these "messengers of Elohim" with the messengers that Jacob himself sends out to gather information.

Genesis 32:3 *And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.*

We should not hold to the position that Jacob has the authority to command the “messengers of Elohim” to do his bidding. The messengers Jacob sends out are indeed mere men of his own company, not the “messengers of Elohim” that meet him on the way to Seir.

A second detail that helps to set the context of this portion concerns the name of the place where Jacob encounters the messengers of Elohim – “Mahanaim.” The root of this Hebrew word is *machaneh* (*mem, chet, nun, hey*), which means “camp” or “encampment.” That the noun is in the “dual” plural form (the suffix being *-im*) indicates that it applies to two things. The dual form is used chiefly to designate objects that are found naturally in pairs, especially parts of the body, but it is also used to indicate two objects which are not naturally connected, as in the word “Mahanaim,” which should be translated as “Two Encampments.” It is possible that Jacob is referring to the camp of Esau and his own camp. It is also possible that he is referring to the camp of the messengers of Elohim and his own camp, or that the name comes from Jacob dividing his own camp into two camps as a defensive measure against Esau.

Genesis 32:7 *Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two camps (machanot).*

Genesis 32:10 *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two camps (machanot).*

I would suggest that the name Mahanaim is not limited to the number two but that it reflects a great variety of encampments, which includes all those mentioned above. Thus, what we witness is what would appear to be the setting of a great battle with numerous encampments settling into an area for the conflict.

The third issue to be addressed from the previous portion that affects the context of this week’s portion is found in the final description and direction given to the messengers of Jacob.

Genesis 32:3 *And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.*

Within this single verse are three words which point back to the source of the conflict between Esau and Jacob, the source of the drama in our portion. The name Seir (*shin, ayin, yud, resh*) means “shaggy” or “hairy.” We may recall that at their birth Jacob was holding on to the heel of Esau, who was born first and was said to be hairy all over.

Genesis 25:25 *And the first came out red, all over like an hairy (shin, ayin, resh) garment; and they called his name Esau.*

The word translated as “country” is the Hebrew word *sadeh* (*shin, dalet, hey*), which can also mean “field.” We may recall that Esau was described as “a man of the field.” It was to the field that Isaac had sent Esau when Jacob came and stole the blessing.

Genesis 25:27 *And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field (shin, dalet, hey); and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.*

Genesis 27:3 *Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field (shin, dalet, hey), and take me some venison.*

Finally, the name Edom comes from the Hebrew root word *adom* (*aleph, dalet, mem*), which means “red.” This name should quickly bring to mind the red pottage Jacob used to purchase Esau’s birthright.

Genesis 25:30-32 *And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. ³¹And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. ³²And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?*

So it is in the final verse of the previous portion that we are reminded of Jacob's wrestling with Esau at his birth, his purchasing of the birthright, and his stealing of the paternal blessing. Within this one sentence all the angst of our portion is established. Jacob fears the threats and reprisals of an angry brother who has been repeatedly bested by deception and persistence.

That Esau is living in the land of Seir east of the Jordan River indicates that he has already driven the Horites from their land. We may recall from earlier testimony that the Horites possessed and dwelt in the land of Mount Seir.

Genesis 14:6 *And the Horites in their mount Seir, unto Elparan, which is by the wilderness.*

This would indicate that Esau was indeed living up to the words of Isaac's prophecy over him.

Genesis 27:40 *And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.*

Now, on his way back to the land of his inheritance, Jacob must pass through this conquered land and face his militant brother. Uncertain of his brother's demeanor, Jacob begins his preparations for the reunion. Jacob instructs his messengers to go as ambassadors to Esau to announce their arrival and their desire for favor.

Genesis 32:4-5 *And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord (adonai) Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: ⁵and I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.*

There are several details we should take note of in this opening communiqué. First, we should note the humility with which Jacob addresses Esau, referring to him as *adonai* instead of merely as "my brother." This title seems to indicate two important aspects of Jacob's thinking. The first alludes to indicate that he is now at his brother's mercy and that the tables have been turned. The second is that Jacob recognizes the schism between them and dares not to speak of himself as family or brother.

The reference to Laban may likewise have several purposes. First, it may be nothing more than an explanation of where he has been for the past twenty years and why he has not come earlier. It is also possible that Esau knows the character of their uncle Laban and that Jacob is confessing that he has learned his lesson after living with this man of deception for twenty years. Is it possible that after living with all of Laban's deceptions, Jacob is beginning to empathize with his own victim? Could this possibly be the source of Jacob's humility? It should be clear that Jacob is taking a posture conducive to reconciliation. The sincerity of Jacob's humility should not be questioned. While some may assume that Jacob is acting in a deceptive manner simply to gain safe passage, this thought is clearly refuted by the manner and size of the gift given to Esau and the public nature of Jacob's humility.

The messengers of Jacob return with the news that Esau knows of his arrival and is advancing with 400 men, a group the size of a militia, to meet him.

1 Samuel 22:2 *And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men.*

1 Samuel 25:13 *And David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; and David also girded on his sword: and there went up after David about four hundred men; and two hundred abode by the stuff.*

1 Samuel 30:10 *But David pursued, he and four hundred men: for two hundred abode behind, which were so faint that they could not go over the brook Besor.*

1 Samuel 30:17 *And David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day: and there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men, which rode upon camels, and fled.*

Jacob understands the actions of his brother to be a potentially dangerous situation. Fearful of his family's well-being, Jacob begins to take defensive measures. While he is not capable of defending himself against such a military attack, he is capable of reducing the damage suffered.

Genesis 32:7-8 *Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands;⁸ and said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape.*

After Jacob does all that is within his power to do, he calls upon the Sovereign of the Universe to intercede on his behalf. We will look at his prayer in greater detail in a moment, but for now let us look at the pattern of Jacob's preparations.

- Jacob gathers information and assesses the situation
- Jacob sends ambassadors seeking peace
- Jacob takes defensive measures
- Jacob prays for intervention

There is an important lesson for us to learn from this pattern. The Creator of the Universe has blessed us with brains and abilities. We should not set these gifts from the Creator aside in order to wait upon a miracle to feed us, clothe us, sustain us, or solve our problems. While we are to wait upon YHWH for His timing and direction in certain matters, we should not, on a daily basis, wait for the Sovereign One of the Universe to tell us what shoe to put on first. We are to utilize our gifts, experience, wisdom, understanding, and knowledge to gather information and assess our situation. When in conflict or potential danger, we should do all that is in our power to avoid conflict. We are told repeatedly to pursue peace and live peacefully with others. We should, like Jacob, drive defensively and reduce risks in our lives. When we have done all that YHWH has enabled us to do and when we have used all of His gifts responsibly, we may call upon the Creator for His help and intervention. It does no good to build an airplane out of lead and then pray that the Sovereign One will miraculously make it fly. It does no good to pray that the Creator will remove calories from the chocolate cake so you can lose weight, nor does it make sense to ask the Holy One to bless the forbidden food on your plate so you can eat whatever you want. We must do all that we can with what the Creator has already bestowed upon us. When we exercise such stewardship of our current blessings, then we may ask for yet more.

Let us now turn our attention to the prayer that Jacob offers up in his time of need.

Genesis 32:9-12 *And Jacob said, O Elohim of my father Abraham, and Elohim of my father Isaac, YHWH which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: ¹⁰I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. ¹¹Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. ¹²And Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.*

Victor P. Hamilton describes Jacob's prayer as being in seven parts.

(1) The address, "O God of my father....O Yahweh"; (2) description, "who told me...I will treat you well"; (3) self-deprecation, "I am undeserving...for your servant"; (4) detail, "with only my staff...into two camps"; (5) petition, "Rescue me from...my brother Esau"; (6) description of distress, "otherwise I fear...children too"; (7) motivation, "For you yourself said...too numerous to be counted."²

While Jacob is described as having been afraid in this situation, we should not confuse his fear for faithlessness. Jacob clearly has faith that YHWH will indeed fulfill the promises made to him. Jacob does fear, however, that these promises may not include the current members of his family. As was the case at Bethel, Jacob may likewise fear that his past behavior may have disqualified him from the promises of YHWH. Jacob admits that he is not worthy of any of the blessings that the Father has bestowed upon him; therefore, he does not lay claim to any favor from the Creator on his own merit. Instead, Jacob points twice to the Creator's own promises and faithfulness.

Hamilton goes on to say:

Jacob has a number of reasons for believing that he has some claim upon God. First, the God he invokes is the family God: O God of my grandfather Abraham, and God of my father Isaac. Second, Jacob is doing only what God told him to do—returning to his land. Third, Jacob has the promise from God that God would treat him well and prosper him. Twice Jacob refers to this promise, in the middle of the prayer and at the end...Jacob's fourth reason for a claim on God is Jacob's own position. He is undeserving of God's kindness...He desires that those kindnesses continue, for God's "loyalty manifest in family and flocks is meaningless if it is suddenly to be cut off." He is also undeserving of Esau's kindness, but he is careful not to mention that. The expression "I am undeserving" is literally "I am little"...The adjective of this root was used back in 27:15, 42 to describe Jacob as Rebekah's "younger son." To be "little" describes one who lacks legal credentials to make a claim for himself, or a person who is totally dependent on another for his welfare. Jacob certainly has no claim against Esau. Accordingly, he can only appeal to Yahweh's fidelity.³

Here we may see a model for our own prayer. Our prayer should be motivated by faith in the fidelity and mercy of YHWH, not in our own merits. We should approach the Sovereign One as a "little one" with a sense of our total dependency upon the Creator and without any sense of legal credentials to make claims for ourselves against His perfect will. Perhaps this is what Yeshua is teaching when he tells his disciples that they must have the faith of a little child.

***Mark 10:14-15** But when Yeshua saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of Elohim. ¹⁵Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of Elohim as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*

Thus, we must call upon the Creator in faith and humility, recognize our unworthiness, recall His faithfulness, and make our simple supplication for His aid. It does not have to be any more complicated than this.

After his prayer is said, Jacob prepares the gift for his brother. We should note that the present for Esau is referred to as a *mincha*, a "gift," rather than *mehkes* (*mem, khaf, samech*), a "tribute," or *mas* (*mem, samech*), a "levy." A *mincha* is freely given, whereas a tribute or a levy is generally extracted or

² New International Commentary on the Old Testament, The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50, Victor P. Hamilton, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Pp. 322-323

³ *Ibid.*, Pg. 323

demanded. Thus, what Jacob prepares to give to Esau is freely given. His gift shows no lack of generosity. There are 550 animals in all. Jacob wisely divides the gift into droves with spaces in between them. Each drove is instructed to tell Esau that Jacob is right behind them. Jacob hopes that each drove will build expectation and then letdown until Esau's emotions are tamed and he will finally rejoice to see his brother Jacob.

Once the gift is sent, Jacob spends the night in the encampment. During the night and under the cover of darkness Jacob takes his wives, his handmaids, and his sons and passes over the brook Jabbok. The name Jabbok is directly connected to the story that follows. The Hebrew word *yabbak* (*yud, bet, kof*), which means "to empty," refers to the brook that "empties" into the Jordan, but it may also refer to the "emptying" of Jacob's pride and self-reliance. The name Yabbok is a cognate of the Hebrew root word *avak* (*aleph, vet, kof*), which means "dust." (*Vet* is the Hebrew letter *bet* without the dot in the middle.) Other such cognates of this root are *avkah* (*aleph, vet, kof, hey*), which means "powder," and *avak* (*aleph, vet, kof*), which means "wrestle." It is thought that as one wrestles, he gets dusty. Again, we may draw a connection between all these words in this one story. Jacob "wrestles" with the Holy One and "empties" himself of his carnal, "dust" of the earth ways.

Once Jacob's family departs, he remains alone at the camp. At this point it may appear as though Jacob is a bit of a coward, putting as many people as possible between him and his assumed enemy Esau. Jacob always seems to be hiding behind something. But this night, alone in the camp, there is nothing for him to hide behind.

What happens next is quite unexpected.

Genesis 32:22-24 *And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. ²³And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had. ²⁴And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.*

This event at the heart of our portion immediately drags us into the drama. Now we too must wrestle with the questions left unanswered by the text. Now we too must wrestle with the meaning of this story and its possible applications and ramifications.

The first question that we must wrestle with is the identification of the man. Once again, it is the ambiguity of the text that plays a key role in the story. The identity of the man is consistently hidden so that we may identify with Jacob, who is likewise ignorant of his assailant's true identity. Like Jacob, we are alone in the dark wrestling with the man. Since the Torah tells us that Jacob is alone in the camp at night, we may understand that the man that Jacob is wrestling with is simply himself. Is it possible that prior to his confrontation with Esau, Jacob is coming to terms with the fact that what he fears is the fruit of his own planting? If this is the case, then the conflict is between the carnal nature and the spiritual nature present in every man. We may look to the words of the apostle Shaul, who clearly understands this wrestling between the two natures quite well.

Galatians 5:17 *For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*

Romans 7:15-25 *For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. ¹⁶If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. ¹⁷Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ¹⁸For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. ¹⁹For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not that I do. ²⁰Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. ²¹I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. ²²For I delight in the law of Elohim after the inward man: ²³but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the*

body of this death? ²⁵I thank Elohim through Yeshua Messiah our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of Elohim; but with the flesh the law of sin.

I would suggest to you that at least in part, Jacob is wrestling with his own conflicted nature. By his prayer, Jacob clearly desires to be in a relationship with the Creator that will afford him protection from every harm. Yet at the same time, Jacob's clever carnal nature relies upon his own willness to escape from such threats of danger. The conflicting instincts of fight or flight may also have been stirring within the anxious Jacob's mind. It is easy, therefore, to relate to Jacob on this level. We all have had moments where we have been caught between the call to faithfulness and obedience to the Word of YHWH and the demands of the world around us to compromise. Like Jacob, we must all wrestle within ourselves between the Spirit of YHWH beckoning us to obedience and our own carnal nature that seeks an easy way out.

While such wrestling is, in fact, waged within us, we must recognize that we are not truly wrestling with ourselves but with the Spirit of YHWH within us. Again, I remind you of the words of Yeshua the Messiah and the apostle Shaul.

John 14:17 *Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and **shall be in you.***

1 Corinthians 3:16 *Know ye not that ye are the temple of Elohim, and that the **Spirit of Elohim dwelleth in you?***

2 Corinthians 1:22 *Who hath also sealed us, and **given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.***

Ephesians 3:16 *That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might **by His Spirit in the inner man.***

We may say, therefore, that Jacob wrestles not with himself, but that the man he wrestles with is none other than the Spirit of the Holy One Himself. The prophet Hosea later informs us that it was an angel that confronted Jacob in the dark solitude of his camp on the eve of his reunion with Esau.

Hosea 12:2-5 *YHWH hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will He recompense him. ³He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with Elohim: ⁴yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto Him: he found Him in Bethel, and there He spake with us; ⁵even YHWH Elohim of hosts; YHWH is His memorial.*

Once again, we must wrestle with the nature of angels. Is this *mal'ach* or "messenger" a separate created supernatural being or the manifest presence of the Holy One Himself? As is the case in the above mentioned stories, I would contend that it is the manifest presence of the Holy One. Thus, what we witness is Jacob wrestling with the presence of the Holy One in manifest form. If Leah, by veiling herself, could appear to Jacob as Rachel, and Jacob, by donning disguise, could appear to Isaac as Esau, could not the Holy One likewise appear as a man or men? Therefore, regardless of whether Jacob is wrestling with the Spirit of the Holy One within himself or with the Holy One veiled as a man in the flesh as a *mal'ach* (angel), we may safely assume that it is the Holy One that Jacob is wrestling with.

During this match it is clear that Jacob wrestles tenaciously throughout the night.

Genesis 32:24-25 *And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. ²⁵And when He saw that He prevailed not against him, He touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as He wrestled with him.*

The mention of the “breaking of the day” seems to give the impression that the assailant will be rendered powerless with the rising of the sun. This has led some scholars to believe that Jacob’s wrestling partner is a demon or even Satan. The rabbinic Torah commentator Rashi teaches that each country has its own ministering angel that reflects the nature of the country, and since Esau is evil, then his guardian angel is also evil or Satan. Rashi likewise teaches that it is Esau’s fallen angel that Jacob wrestles with.⁴ There is, of course, nothing in the text to support such an understanding. It is preposterous to suppose that Jacob would ask Satan or any “demon” to bless him. Nor does it make any sense at all to claim that after Jacob wrestles with a demon, he claims to have seen the face of Elohim! Therefore, we must dismiss all such notions of Jacob wrestling with demons, fallen angels, Satan, or anything other than the Spirit of the Holy One. The fact that the dawn is mentioned does not indicate anything about the character or nature of Jacob’s opponent. Instead, it is cited to demonstrate that the wrestling match is coming to an end. As we shall see confirmed in a moment, the purpose of informing us of the breaking of day is to alert us that a new day is dawning. Jacob is coming out of the darkness of the past and is beginning to walk in a whole new light. In fact, from this point on in the story of Jacob we shall indeed see him in a new light. We should note that Jacob himself understands his opponent to be Elohim, as is indicated by the very name that Jacob bestows upon the place.

Genesis 32:30 *And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen Elohim face to face, and my life is preserved.*

In the course of the wrestling the text tells us that Jacob’s opponent touches or smites the “hollow of his thigh.” Here again we are left to grapple with the meaning of this passage. We have witnessed in earlier stories how the word “thigh” (yarech) is sometimes used to delicately speak of male genitals.

Genesis 24:2 *And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my **thigh** (yarech).*

Genesis 24:9 *And the servant put his hand under the **thigh** (yarech) of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning that matter.*

Genesis 47:29 *And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh (yarech), and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt.*

Exodus 1:5 *And all the souls that came out of the **loins** (yarech) of Jacob were seventy souls: for Joseph was in Egypt already.*

Numbers 5:21 *Then the priest shall charge the woman with an oath of cursing, and the priest shall say unto the woman, YHWH make thee a curse and an oath among thy people, when YHWH doth make thy **thigh** (yarech) to rot, and thy belly to swell.*

The Hebrew word *khaf* (*khaf, fey*), which is translated as "hollow" in our portion, has the connotation of hollowness and may mean “pan,” “vessel,” or “pouch.” While traditionally this word has been associated with the “hollow” of the hip socket, it may also be applied to the scrotum. Victor Hamilton explains:

Since kap has the connotation of hollowness, (as a vessel or pan or pouch), and yarek may have the meaning of genitals, it is possible that the phrase kap yeraka refers to the scrotum, the hollow pouch of skin holding the testicles, rather than to the hip socket. Thus the situation would be that two men are engaged in combat, and at some point in the contest one combatant touches/strikes the scrotum of the other combatant. This

⁴ The Sapirstein Edition Rashi, Bereishis, ArtScroll / Mesorah Publications, Pg. 370; The Stone Edition Chumash, ArtScroll / Mesorah Publications, Pg. 170

*situation would then be comparable to that envisioned in the law of Deut. 25:11-12 in which two men are wrestling. The wife of the losing disadvantages the winning combatant by "seizing him by the private parts (RSV)."*⁵

The text tells us that the result of this touching is the dislocation of Jacob's thigh. But again we need to ponder carefully what the Torah is delicately trying to teach us. The word translated as "dislocated" is the Hebrew word *yaka* (*yud, kof, ayin*), which can mean "to separate." While it is possible that all that happened to Jacob was that his thigh was struck and knocked out of its socket, I would suggest that the Torah is informing us that the "seed" of Jacob would be "separated" and set apart in the world. Thus, just as Jacob separated his "seed" from Laban and the past, now he must separate his "seed" even from Esau. While Jacob may reconcile with Esau, there is to be no mixing of the seed. The line of Jacob is to be separate from all others.

We should note that one outcome of this wrestling match is that Jacob walks with a limp. Just as Jacob now begins a new day or era, he likewise begins with a new walk. Another outcome of this contest is a change in diet. The Torah teaches that the children of Israel no longer eat the *gyd hanasheh* or the "sinew which shrank" from the thigh. Traditionally, this has been understood by the rabbis to be the sciatic nerve in the thigh. But given the above teaching on the male genitals, it is more probable that this dietary change is a prohibition against eating the meat of the male genitals. Again, Victor Hamilton explains:

*The origin and meaning of the Hebrew word nasheh are more difficult to determine than that of gid. The former occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible. Geverty suggests that nasheh was related to the Akkadian nishu, "people," "life"; Ugaritic nsh, "man"; and Hebrew enosh, "man." Thus, the expression gid hanasheh denotes the membrum virile, "the male sinew," the "life (-producing) sinew," and the food taboo of verse 32 has specific references to the male genitals.*⁶

The third and most notable change to come from this wrestling match is the change of name. Once again we see a picture of Jacob the "heel grabber" who refuses to let his opponent escape without blessing him first.

Genesis 32:26-32 *And He said, Let Me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me. ²⁷And He said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. ²⁸And He said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with Elohim and with men, and hast prevailed. ²⁹And Jacob asked Him, and said, Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name. And He said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after My name? And He blessed him there. ³⁰And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen Elohim face to face, and my life is preserved. ³¹And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh. ³²Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because He touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.*

By asking Jacob to state his name, the man forces Jacob to admit what he is. Jacob declares that he is a "heel" and a "supplanter," but now the man tells him that he shall be this way no more. Jacob is entering a new walk and a new day, and now he shall be called by a new name, Israel. There is some debate about the exact meaning of this name. The confusion comes in the etymology given in the text itself. The name Israel may be a play on the word *sarah* (*sin, resh, hey*), which means "to persist." This is also a cognate of the Hebrew word *sar* (*sin, resh*), which means "captain," "prince," or "ruler." The man declares

⁵ New International Commentary on the Old Testament, The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50, Victor P. Hamilton, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Pg. 331

⁶ *Ibid.*, Pg. 338

that Jacob has persisted (*sarah*) with Elohim. Therefore, the name Israel may mean "Ruler of El" or "Prince of El."

The debate comes in the fact that when the divine name is used in a title, El is generally the subject, not the object, so we would interpret the name Israel as "the Ruler Is El" or "Our El Rules." Since the text itself testifies that it is Jacob who triumphs and that he is the father of a new line or people, I think the plain meaning of the text should prevail, and the title should be understood to be a sign of the blessing bestowed upon Jacob, who shall be called Israel, the Prince of El.

What follows the wrestling match is the much-anticipated encounter with Esau. We should note here, however, the change in Jacob's plans. Prior to the wrestling event, Jacob had put everyone in front of him. All of the droves and even his family preceded him like shields against the perceived threat of his brother. Now, however, we witness Jacob at the forefront of his family as the leader.

Genesis 33:1-3 *And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. ²And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost. ³And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.*

Seven times Jacob humbles himself and bows to his brother. Again, Jacob's humility and desire for peace are made quite evident. Clearly Esau is touched by the appearance of his brother and runs to meet him. While there are some who claim that Esau was merely saving face by his actions and that he truly desired to destroy Jacob, there is nothing in the text to indicate such an attitude. In the Torah scroll there are five small dots above the words "and kissed him." Some of the rabbis declare that these five dots represent "teeth marks," indicating that Esau wanted to bite his brother on the neck and kill him. I agree with Ibn Ezra, who wrote:

The Midrashic interpretation concerning the dots on ve-yeshakehu (and kissed him) is good for them that are drawn from the breasts (for children). It is obvious from the plain meaning of the text that Esau did not intend to harm Jacob, the proof being "and they wept," as Joseph did with his brethren.⁷

What is revealed in this encounter is the fact that there is no need for Jacob to fear anything. Jacob's own actions had caused him to fear his brother. He knew that he had wronged his brother, and it was this guilt that gave birth to his fear. Through humility Jacob appeases his perceived enemy and wins the desired peace. While there is peace made between the two brothers, there is no unity. Clearly our story ends with Jacob and Esau going their separate ways. While Esau invites his brother to join him in Mount Seir, Jacob's course is guided by the commandment of YHWH.

Genesis 31:3 *And YHWH said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.*

So it is that Israel must return to the land of his father and the land of his inheritance. Here we witness the fullness of the purpose and plan of YHWH – the chosen people in the chosen land, living by the Word of YHWH their Elohim.

⁷ Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis (Bereshit), H. Norman Strickman, Abraham Ben Meir Ibn Ezra, Arthur M. Silver, Menorah Publishing Company, Pg. 319

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