

May 28, 2017 - Gen. 32:4 – 33:17 - Jacob Wrestles With God
Torah Readings: Gen. 32:4 – 33:17 - Jacob Wrestles With God
Psalm 27
Haftarah - (1) Obadiah 1:1-9 + 21
(2) Isaiah 21:11-17 + 22:21-23
(3) Joel 4:13-21 + Amos 1:11-12

Let's backtrack briefly

There is a fascinating theory - that Jacob (already a trickster after getting Esau's birthright) was encouraged to believe he was a bigger trickster than he actually was.

(See <http://www.jbq.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/391/Deceiver.pdf>)

There are hints that Isaac was in on Rebekah's plan to substitute Jacob for Esau. Rebekah probably had told Isaac of God's word to her that the younger would serve the elder. But convention and custom prohibited this. There had to be an "accident" so Esau would not be totally rejected (although both were displeased with Esau's taking Hittite wives).

Gen. 26:2-5 - "I will make your descendants . . . numerous . . . because Abraham hearkened to my voice"

The Hebrew for the word "because," *akev* is made up of the Hebrew letters ayin-kuf-vet (a-q-v). They are the exact same root letters, in the same order, as the word Jacob. The coded message then is that the promise will be fulfilled "by your seed – *akev* . . . i.e. Ya-akov[.]”

The same message had come to Abraham years before at the binding of Isaac: "because (*akev*) you have hearkened to my voice" (Gen. 22:16-18). Isaac would have remembered this.

The ruse also accomplished another thing. Jacob's destiny was to become the third patriarch, the person who would develop into Israel, father of the twelve tribes. But Jacob was a "mild man" (Gen. 25:27), so his involvement in the plan will force him out of his comfort zone, and give him confidence in his own resourcefulness. And Jacob the homebody will then be forced to flee his home and prove himself out in the world, something that might not happen otherwise.

This was the first step in pushing Jacob to fulfill his destiny.

Jacob's Spiritual Transformation

Initially, Jacob thought only of himself, and used his supposed skill at trickery to advance his own goals. Although his mother Rebekah understood Jacob's true spiritual destiny - that "the younger shall serve the latter" - Jacob apparently showed little consideration of God.

For instance, he refers to “the Lord *your* God” rather than “the Lord *our* God” in speaking to his father (**Genesis 27:20**)

Jacob’s only saving characteristic was that he was honest with himself. He admitted to himself that he was tricking his father out of his brother’s blessing.

Genesis 27:12 - “I shall seem to him as a deceiver” or “he will see my deception.”

His first test was in the dangerous wilderness journey to Haran. At Bethel he sees the ascending ladder to heaven in his dream, but unlike other prophets who describe ascensions to heaven (Ezekiel, Paul, John in Revelation) he doesn’t ascend himself. He’s not ready or able to. His prayer proves this - it’s just a bargain with God.

His first big transformation is when he meets Rachel. Rolling the stone slab from the well and watering her flocks is the first example of his doing something for someone else. Working years for Rachel shows his was a real love and not just the love of “being in love.”

Laban’s trickery outpaces Jacob’s own over the years, but the words of the Angel - that Jacob’s success was God’s doing all along - assure Jacob that he has vastly greater resources to draw on than just his own guile.

Finally Jacob ends his passive-aggressive trickery in a final confrontation with Laban, and speaks honestly face-to-face about his complaints. And he now publicly credits God with his success. - “If the God of my father - the God of Abraham, the one whom Isaac fears - had not been with me, you would certainly have sent me away empty-handed!” (**Genesis 31:42**)

This “contending” or “riyb.” was a foreshadowing of a greater “wrestling” with God that was to come. The result is that Laban makes peace with him, and a boundary is set. But he faces an even greater test with Esau.

(See *The Man Who Wrestled With God* by John A. Sanford)

Genesis 32:3-6 - Continuing with the openness he had shown to Laban, Jacob sends messengers to announce his coming to Esau. Angels had just met him, and he was confident of God’s presence.

But then there is bad news - Esau is coming with 400 armed men, possibly bent on violence.

Genesis 32:7 - “Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed”

The Rabbis interpreted his fear not as wavering about God’s ability to protect him, but at his own ability to maintain his new-found innocence of character before God.

“A man whom the Lord had promised (security), should he fear and be afraid? But what Jacob meant was: ‘Woe is me, peradventure sin has made me forfeit (Divine protection).’” (Mekhilta Beshalab)

Or again, “Why was he (Jacob) afraid? He said: Peradventure I strayed in some way whilst with Laban ... and the Holy One has consequently left me” (Tanhuma, Hukkat, 25)

A Midrash points to the example of Moses, who was afraid when God told him (Numbers 21:34) “Fear him not.” “Who is told not to be afraid other than one who is afraid? From here you may learn that there is no guarantee for the righteous in this world.” (Genesis Rabbah 76)

In response, Jacob divides his caravan into two groups as a precaution.

Was this really believing in God’s protection? There is a fine line between faith and presumption. “One must not depend on miracles,” is a familiar maxim in the Talmud. (Shabbat 32a, Jerusalem Talmud, Yoma 1.4).

Rabbi Eliezer b. Jacob, commenting on Deuteronomy 2:7 - For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand.” says: “blessed you” - you might think this is the case even if you had sat idle. The text therefore adds: “in all the work of thy hand.” If he worked, he is blessed, otherwise he is not blessed.”

Jacob’s Prayer

Then Jacob prays a genuine prayer of emotional honesty, humility and faith:

Genesis 32:9-12 - “And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee:

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 bands.

Deliver 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.

And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.”

In Hebrew the word for “I am not worthy” is *qatontî*, literally “I have shrunk.”

The experience of this prayer may have caused Jacob to see more clearly and realize more deeply how he had wronged his brother.

Jacob then sends his servants to meet Esau with gifts.

Genesis 32:18 - “Then 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.”

“My Lord Esau”

The Rabbis were divided in response to Jacob’s humility before Esau. Some condemned his actions, saying because Jacob called Esau “My Lord” eight times, God said “I shall raise up from his children eight kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel.” (Genesis Rabbah 75, 11)

Further, they said this deference to a violent enemy would only encourage him: “He who acts like a kid, the wolves devour him.”

Some praised Jacob’s conduct: “Said Rabbi Jonathan: Whoever wished to placate a king or authority and is not familiar with their ways and tactics should place this chapter in front of him and learn from it in the arts of appeasement and placation.” Others noted that Esau’s heart was immediately worked on by Jacob’s humble pleadings, comparing his conduct with the parable of the reed that bends before the storm.

Some note that the command to “honor thy father and mother” includes an extra vowel point, which they interpret to mean that the elder brother is included. Jacob was deliberately showing that he still honored Esau as his elder brother, paying him the honor due a parent.

Jacob sends the rest of his part of the caravan across the ford at Jabbok, and remains alone to meet Esau.

Wrestling with God

Commentators argue over whether this was an external event or one taking place within the soul of Jacob himself through a vision. Others insist Jacob wrestled with the Angel of Esau, and that Jacob forced him to acknowledge his rightful title to the paternal blessing.

The evidence seems weighted toward Jacob wrestling with either God, the frequently mentioned “Angel of the Lord” who is an equal stand-in for God, or a pre-existent Christ as the Angel of God.

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

The Septuagint has "God" in Genesis 32:30 where Jacob says "For I have seen God face to face."

The Targum of Onkelos offers "because I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face"

The Targum of Palestine gives "because I have seen the Angels of the Lord face to

face"

The Hebrew text has "I have seen God (elohiym) face to face." But Hosea 12:4 recounts the episode by supplying the word for angel (mal'ak).

Midrash Rabbah commenting on this says that Jacob "saw the face of God in the Holy Spirit" (lit. 'in the Shechina').

The 'Angel of His Presence'

Isaiah 63:9 presents a mystical enigma, which in a certain way is connected with the Jabbok river account.

Isaiah says: "In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence [Heb. 'countenance'] saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old."

The Rabbis say that this "angel of his presence" means the "Angel of the Covenant and the Prince of the Countenance". In Hebrew the phrase is Sar ha-Panim, literally 'the Prince of the faces' or 'countenance'. Rabbi David Qimhi says of Malachi 3:1, the Lord who will "suddenly come to his temple", that "this Lord is the Messiah-King, and he is the Lord of the Covenant"

The Jewish prayerbook, the Sidûr ha-Shalem, contains, in the New Year prayers in connection with the sounding of the shofar horn, a remarkable prayer which speaks of "Jesus, the Prince of the Countenance."

"May it be Thy will that the blast from this horn should carry to the tabernacle of God by the instrumentality of our delegate Tartiel, whose name Elias -- may his memory be blessed -- has given to him, and through Jesus (Yeshua, Savior) the Prince of the Countenance and the Prince Metatron, and may grace be our part. Be Thou blessed, Lord of grace."

Stockholm's chief Rabbi, Professor Gottlieb Klein, wrote in 1898 that in Judaism Metatron is often identified with the Word or Logos, and he shows that there are five such intermediaries in the Talmud: "1. Metatron, 2. The Word of Yahweh, Mimra, 3. God's hovering glory, the Shechina, 4. God's Holy Spirit, Rûah ha-Qôdesh, and 5. the Voice from Heaven, Bath Qôl.(lit. 'daughter of a voice')"

When Israel's Ark of the Covenant was being built the angels received the commission to build in Heaven an abode for "the youth whose name is Metatron, in which dwelling he will bring the souls of the Just to God to atone for Israel during the Captivity"

In Judges ch. 6 there is an account of how the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon. We read that "The LORD turned to him and said," and "The LORD answered him," identifying the angel with "the LORD". Gideon exclaims, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!" (vv 14,16 and 22). But what, in the opinion of the Rabbis, is so exceptional in this angel of the LORD?

When the most famous Rabbi of the Middle Ages Rashi considered this issue he referred to the words of **Exodus 23:20--21**: "See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way... Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him... since my name is in him."

Rashi suggests that the words at the end of the verse " 'my name is in him' mean 'He and I have the same name.'"

"And our Rabbis have said," he continues, "that this is Metatron, whose name is the same as the name of the LORD. The numeric value of 'Metatron' corresponds to that of 'Shaddai', the name of the Almighty."

It was of him Moses was speaking when he said, in Ex. 33:15: "If your presence (Heb. 'face') does not go with us do not send us up from here." Ramban sees here and in the preceding verses Metatron and the angel of the covenant. Small wonder that as early as the Talmud we find the simple statement that Metatron is also the Prince of the Countenance

The Mimra (Logos or Word) concept associated with God and his manifestations appears 596 times in the Targums -- but not once in the Talmud.

In **Gen. 16:13** Hagar speaks with the "angel of the LORD" and "calls him the LORD's Mimra" (Yer.); In Gen. 22, where Abraham speaks with the angel of the LORD, who is given the name "the LORD's Mimra", and in v.8 "The LORD's Mimra himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering" (Yer.); In **Gen. 28:20** Jacob makes a vow and says, "If the LORD's Mimra will be with me... then the LORD's Mimra will be my God" (Targum Onqelos)

These are all equated.

Tartiel = tartei El, or "God's other form" in which he reveals himself.

'Metatron' comes from the Greek meta thronon, that is, 'the one who sits on the throne'. Targum Jonathan, on Gen. 5:24 in which we read of the translation of Enoch (how he walked with God and then "was no more"), says that "He ascended to heaven and God called him by the name Metatron, the Great Scribe".

"Metatron is the nearest person to God, serving him; on the one hand his confidant and delegate, on the other hand the representative of Israel before God... Metatron is also known as Sar ha-Panîm, the 'Prince of the Countenance' or just as 'the Prince', and he sits in God's innermost chamber (penim). The numeric value of 'Metatron' is the same as that of Shaddai, 'the Almighty'. He is therefore the delegate of the Almighty. Shaddai (10+4+300) = 314 and Metatron (50+6+200+9+9+40) = 314."

- The above is from a paper by Stockholm's chief Rabbi, Professor Gottlieb Klein, 1898

(See <http://www.ristosantala.com/rsla/OT/OT11.html>)

But what was Jacob's struggle all about?

Jacob had been wrestling since before he was born, first with his brother Esau in the womb (that's why the Rabbis saw a continuance of that struggle here).

This conflict brings to a head Jacob's lifetime of conflict (with Esau, Isaac, Laban, Leah, and Rachel). Can it be, perhaps, that all these conflicts really represented manifestations of this single one? All this time can Jacob have been struggling with and against God?

The struggle lasts all night (vs. 32-24), and it comes amid weeping and prayer (**Hosea 12:4**).

Now he was by all appearances facing almost certain death from Esau. He was probably reviewing his life, seeing the futility of his guile and trickery, and yet grasping at the hope of God's promise.

Pounded to Dust

The word for wrestled "abaq" means to pound down, turn into dust, float away (as vapor). It can be translated "wrestle" because dust is flying in such a contest.

Jacob was forced to see his mortality. His birthright and blessing both would be for nothing if he was killed by Esau. So he demands a blessing from the Angel.

Genesis 32:25 - "And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh (*yarek*); and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him."

The *yarek* refers to the upper thigh and genitals. Some Rabbis saw here a reference to circumcision. And they saw a similarity between this incident and when God sought to kill Moses because he had not circumcised his son (Exodus 4:25).

Even more interesting is the word of "out of joint" or "yaqa" in **Genesis 32:25**. It means to be dislocated, alienated, or to "hang from a stake" or "be impaled on a stake" - a punishment by which the limbs were dislocated.

(Consequently, Jews are forbidden to eat the sinew of the thigh even today)

Recall the Messianic psalm that prefigures Christ's crucifixion:

Psalms 22:14 - "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax"

In Jacob's weeping and prayer we can see Jesus' night of agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jacob's thigh out of joint is a symbol of his own death, his returning to dust, his "crucifixion" as a type of Christ.

In one Jewish tradition, God rebukes the Archangel Michael for harming Jacob, saying, “Why didst thou do harm to **my first-born son**?” And the archangel answered, “I did it only to glorify Thee.” And then God appointed Michael as the guardian angel of Jacob and his seed unto the end of all generations.

— “Legends of the Jews,” by Louis Ginzberg

The only way to see the face of God and live is to see Christ, accept your own death, and “arise” in his new life.

2 Corinthians 3:18 - “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

2 Corinthians 4:6 - “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Later, a transformed Jacob said to Esau, “Truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God” (**Gen. 33:10**). He could see through his circumstances and see God “ruling” everywhere.

A New Name - Israel

Like Abram, Jacob receives a new name.

Jacob’s limp was a constant reminder of his death to self, his transformation from deceiver to Israel “God prevails,” “contender with God,” or “God rules”

Israel is related to the verb “sarah” which in Biblical Hebrew means “to struggle, to strive, to exercise influence, contend, have power, persevere” in this context, with God Himself.

Jacob / Israel “contended with God” and now knows that “God rules.”

Remember, Rashi says that his original name - Jacob or 'Yaakov' - refers to a person who waits in ambush, like the serpent that strikes at the heel.

Genesis 3:15 - “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

Jacob - crushed to dust in his struggle with God - was to no longer have the mind of the serpent but the mind of the Messiah.

Another interpretation:

When the angel says to Jacob, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel,” the

implication is that you and your children shall no longer be known by a name that signifies deception, but by a name that symbolizes honesty (yosher). Thus yashar (straight/honest) is the root of both Israel (Yisrael) and Jeshurun (Yeshurun). Jeshurun is used to refer to people of Israel in the Book of Deuteronomy.

- See "That's Not What the Good Book Says," by Avigdor Shinan and Yair Zakovitch

More on Jacob's Name Change

"No more shall you be called Jacob, but Israel, " declared the angel (**Genesis 32:29**).

Jacob's name was changed to Israel, but the name Jacob was retained as a secondary or alternate description of him and the people of Israel. The Scriptures refer to him later using either name.

In fact, many times "Israel" was used specifically to point to Messiah (Isaiah 49:3 - "You are my Servant, Israel...").

(On Isaiah's Suffering Servant, see 'The Gospel According to Isaiah 53' - http://www.wtsbooks.com/common/pdf_links/9780825425936.pdf)

Bar Kappara taught: Whoever calls Abraham Abram transgresses a positive precept, since it says, Thy name shall be Abraham. R. Eliezer says: He transgresses a negative command, since it says, Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram. But if that is so, then the same should apply to one who calls Sarah Sarai? — In her case the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. But if that is so, the same should apply to one who calls Jacob Jacob? — There is a difference in his case, because Scripture restored it [the name Jacob] to him, as it is written: And God spoke unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. (**Genesis 46:2**) - (Babylonian Talmud, Berakoth13)

Balaam's blessing:

Numbers 23:21 - "He hath not beheld iniquity (*aven* - self exertion) in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness (labor, toil) in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them."

or "[God] sees no guilt in Jacob, nor toil in Israel." i.e. "aven" can mean guilt/vanity/emptiness usually associated with idolatry.

According to the Rabbis, this implies that Jacob does experience toil, though his struggles and difficulties do not result in guilt in the eyes of God. Israel, on the other hand, enjoys a tranquil existence, devoid not only of guilt but also of toil. Israel is at rest.

The Meeting with Esau

Despite their reconciliation, Esau remains Esau.

Esau/the flesh always overdrives and oppresses, while the Spirit of God leads softly without coercion.

Genesis 33:13-14 - “And 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. Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on softly ... ”

After Jacob’s struggle, he finds some solace in Succoth, the word used for “booths” at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Genesis 33:17 - “And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.”