

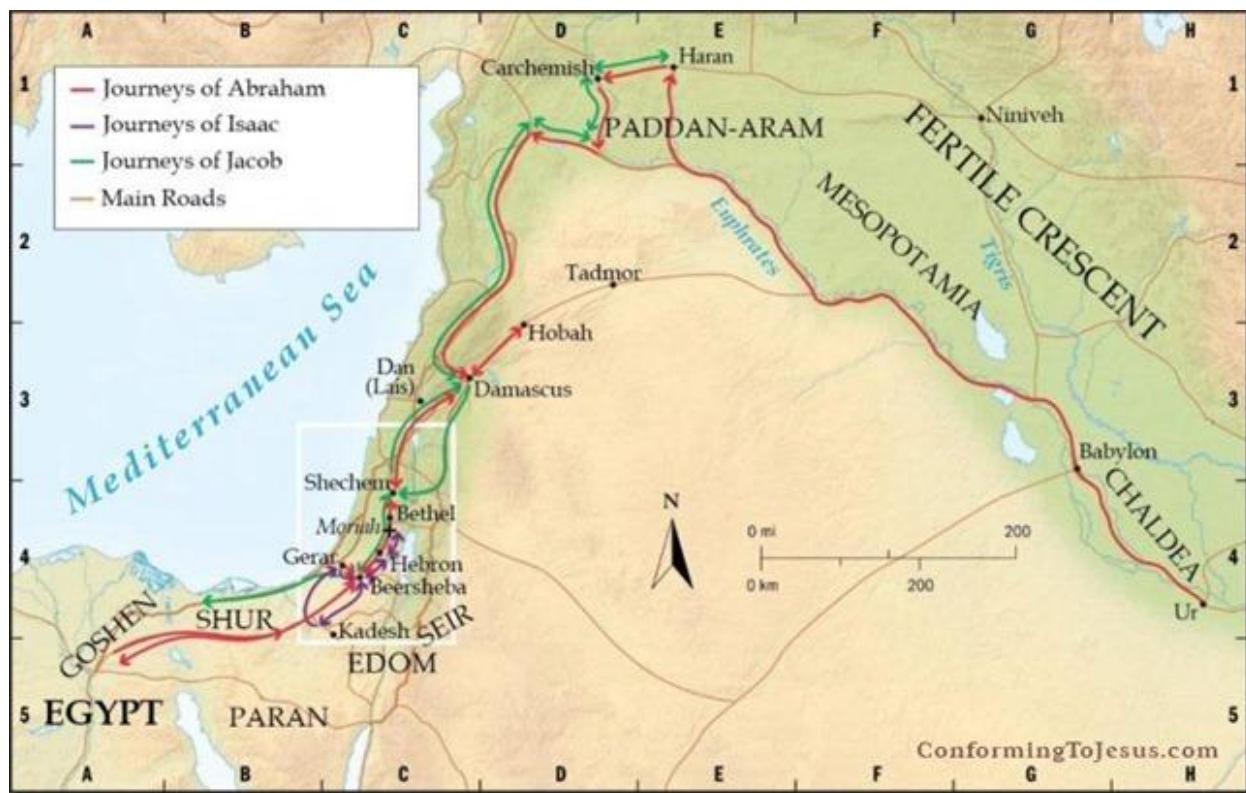
Beth Tephila Messianic Jewish Congregation

(Under same management for over 5781 years)

SHABBAT SERVICE

November 28th- 10:30 AM Lolo Community "Synagogue"

12:30 PM Oneg Shabbat & In-Depth Torah Study



VaYetse

"And he went out..."

וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעַר שָׁוַי וַיֵּלֶךְ חָרָנָה:

Vayetse Ya'akov mi-B'er Shava vayelech Charanah.

"Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran."

Parashat VaYetse -- Genesis 28:10 - 32:2

Last week the Torah portion covered Rebekah and Jacob's deception of Isaac. We know that when this deception was uncovered, Isaac was so upset that he... "trembled violently (27:33)." Yet Isaac still seemed to understand that his blessing went to the son to whom it belonged. As for Jacob, he could be a conniver and a schemer, but his more prominent characteristic was his spiritual acumen, his zeal for the things of God. He recognized the value of the birthright (promised by God before his birth "the older shall serve the younger" 25:23) and pushed aside obstacles to get it for himself, rather than waiting for God's timing to provide it.

But rather than trying to take back his blessing to Jacob on grounds of deception or perhaps adding curses to the blessing, Isaac told Esau, ..."and he (Jacob) shall be blessed. (27:33)" Previously, I have mentioned God's method of blessing Abraham's and Isaac's non-chosen sons. They were given gifts away from the promised inheritance of the chosen son. So while Isaac did provide a blessing for Esau, the inheritance of Esau and his descendants was outside the land promised to Isaac. It is obvious that Esau did not have a heart for God, and therefore had no spiritual sensitivity. Convinced that Jacob had stolen his birthright, Esau bore a grudge against Jacob and threatened to kill him. But Rebecca heard about Esau's threat to kill Jacob and convinced Isaac to send Jacob back to her family to find a wife in order to remove Jacob from perceived danger.

Many times human beings become impatient, waiting for God to do what we think He should do "right now." Sometimes with the best of motives, we seek to "help God" with His plans. In previous Torah portions, we have observed Abraham accede to Sarah's wishes and "go into Hagar" in order to provide a child for Sarah, as God promised her. For many years, Sarah had endured the mocking of women, who had been given children. Why had Sarah not conceived, when God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be like the stars in the sky and would populate the "promised land?" So Sarah, just like us, figured that she could "help" facilitate God's promise by having Hagar provide Abraham and Sarah a child.

Many times when we take it upon ourselves to "help" God with His (our) plans, we really make a mess and have to endure the CONSEQUENCES of our mess.

Beginning with the ill-advised plan of Sarah that produced Ishmael and that has continued to have deleterious consequences for the Jewish people, we will see in **VaYetse** that there will be consequences for both Jacob, for Jacob's immediate family, and for future generations who learned from Jacob about deception, thinking that deception can be profitable. Jacob, his family, and future generations would "help God" and themselves through deception and find "measure by measure" that they, too, were deceived.

In VaYeteze, we find Rebekah making plans to "help" God fulfill His plan that her older son will serve her younger son. After over-hearing the plan of Esau to murder his younger brother, Jacob, Rebecca "commanded" Jacob to flee to the house of her brother Laban. There Jacob was to find a wife and be ready to return, when Rebecca sent for him. On the surface from a motherly point of view, her plan **to save Jacob from death was admirable and totally consistent with God's revealed plan to preserve Jacob as the "chosen seed."** Had Rebekah not intervened, **would God have allowed Jacob to die at the hands of Esau? Absolutely not!** God's revealed will cannot be thwarted by man! God would have not allowed Jacob to die. However, the results of the actions of Sarah had direct consequences for her and for Jacob. Although Sarah believed that she would send for Jacob, when the anger of Esau subsided, Sarah would never again see her beloved son. She would never meet her daughters-in-law nor enjoy her grandchildren. Jacob was sent out of the "promised land," something his grandfather, Abraham, absolutely forbid for Jacob's father, Isaac. Having no dowry sent with him, Jacob had to work for his uncle, Laban, in a foreign land among people who despised him.... all-the-while fearing the wrath of Esau, when he returned home.

God could have accomplished His will for Jacob to have inherited His promises without the unnecessary intervention of Sarah, just like He would have provided Sarah a son from her own body without her intervention. Many times, all we are required to do is to wait for God's timing; to wait for Him to accomplish His will. Can you recall an incident in the early life of Moses, when he presumed on God's timing to take leadership of the Jewish people? You will recall that Moses was not successful in taking leadership at that time because it was not God's time for him to do so. The consequence of his failure to wait for God's timing led to his flight from the court of Pharaoh, the basis of his poor self-image, and his first "desert vacation." What an unnecessary web we weave, when we make our own plans to deceive!

Jacob Flees - God protects and Provides

This week's Torah Portion begins with Jacob leaving Beersheba on route to Haran, stopping for the night at "**Bethel**" (house of God) 28:19. (Orthodox Jews teach that this place was actually Mt. Moriah, where the temple would later be built.) Certainly Jacob realized that this was the very place that his grand-father, Abraham, first instituted public worship of God in the "promised land" (**Genesis12:8;13:3**). When he left his family and traveled by himself, Jacob first stopped at a place, where he knew God's presence had been previously. As Jacob slept, God gave him a dream in which He reconfirmed to him the protection of the Abrahamic Covenant. In his dream, Jacob saw.... "a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it..." (28:12).



"Jacob's Ladder"

God was telling Jacob in his dream that wherever he went, God would be with him and would bring him back to the land promised to him. When Jacob awoke, his response was to consecrate the place to God, making a vow that when he returns to the land, "....the Lord will be my God" and "I will surely give a tenth to Thee (28:22)." Should we, who are believers in Messiah, not also rely on God to be with us wherever we go (even when we are out of His will) and demonstrate our faith in God like Jacob by returning to God a portion of the resources He has provided us?



The Journey for a Wife

In **Chapter 29**, Jacob, sought a wife from his relatives in Haran. "And it came about, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother....that Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and watered the flock of Laban..." (vs.10).

**"Then Jacob kissed Rachel and lifted his voice and wept."
(vs.11)**



Rachel ran to tell her father that Jacob, his nephew, had come to look for a wife. Jacob became part of their household and served Laban for the privilege of marrying his daughter, Rachel. Actually, he ended up marrying two wives, inheriting two maids, and producing twelve sons. These sons of Jacob would become the fathers of the twelve

tribes of Israel. This Shabbat, we will see how, according to God's irony, Jacob, the deceiver of his father, Isaac, was himself deceived by Laban, his uncle. The English translation of the Hebrew names of his two wives were "wild cow" (Leah) and "ewe lamb" (Rachel). Which of these do think was "beautiful of form and face?" (29:17) **Hosea 12:12** states "Jacob fled to the land of Aram, and Israel worked for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep." The persistence and endurance of Jacob is notable. Jacob was so steadfast in his pursuit of Rachel that seven years of service "seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her (vs.20)". And after finding to his surprise that he had actually married Leah [..."behold, it was Leah!"] (vs.25), Jacob confronts his father-in-law with angry words: "What is this you have done to me? I worked with you for Rachel! Why did you deceive me?" But Laban simply replies "**It is not the practice in our place to put the younger before the older.**" When Jacob heard Laban's words, he surely must have realized that "measure for measure" **God was recompensing him the consequences for his deception of Isaac,** " I am Esau your first born...."

Jacob promised to serve Laban another seven years to pay the dowry for Rachel. During this time of working for Laban, Laban observed that God was blessing him on account of Jacob (30:27); the outworking of the Abrahamic Covenant: "And I will bless those who bless you" (12:3). Does God still extend His blessing to those who bless Israel? This is called "blessing by extension," where a person or nation is blessed based on (1) their being a blessing to Israel or (2) their work for God fulfilling His purposes for Israel and for the Jewish people. After working 14 years for Laban, Jacob struck a deal with him. Jacob continued to work for Laban for another six years and began to acquire sheep and goats for himself. God prospered Jacob, who became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys" (30:43). Read about Jacob's negotiation with Laban for the speckled and spotted sheep, black lambs, and speckled goats. Do you think that the increase in Jacob's flocks had to do with his shrewd negotiations or his animal husbandry? Hint: 31:9. Would you say that God used Jacob's plan in order to bless him, or that God blessed him in spite of his plan?



Striped, Spotted, and Speckled Sheep & Goats (30:32)

Chapter 31 begins after Jacob had been working for Laban for twenty years. Jacob's prosperity had incurred the animosity of Laban and his sons, since Jacobs herds were so much more prosperous than theirs. Jacob also had ill feelings towards Laban, who evidently had changed his agreement with Jacob ten times, trying unsuccessfully to gain the advantage. In verse 7, Jacob states an important principle for us today, when we feel we are being persecuted: "...God did not allow him to hurt me." This principle also applies to all nations having relations with Israel today. God can only bless them, as they bless Israel. Just at this time (God's timing is always perfect.), ..."the Lord said to Jacob, 'Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you'" (31:3,13). I'm sure that Jacob was more than ready to leave for home, but how will he convince his wives to pack up and leave the only home they have ever known? Although we are not given the details, we find that Rachel and Leah have figured out that their father was not going to give them any inheritance (31:14-16), treating them more like foreigners than like his own children. Therefore they were ready to go with Jacob. **Isn't it wonderful for men to know that when we are in God's will, He can even convince our wives?**

Even though God had just appeared to Jacob to tell him that He would be with him as he left for home, Jacob still felt he had to deceive Laban ..."by not telling him that he was fleeing" (31:20). Unknown to Jacob, his wife, Rachel, had learned to be deceitful too. She stole her father's household idols.



These idols of fertility gave the holder the right to the estate from which they came. After three days, Laban realized that Jacob and his daughters...along with the household idols....were missing. He took enough men "to do you harm..."(vs.29) and pursued them.

Laban's intent to take back "**his possessions**" was clear: "**The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine** (vs.43)." Jacob, his wives and children, and his servants and flocks must have been traveling as fast as possible because it took Laban and his men seven days to catch up with them. The night before they overtook Jacob, God told Laban not "to speak either good or bad to Jacob;" essentially not to harm Jacob. When Laban caught up with Jacob, all he seemed to want was the return of his household idols. **Rachel** again **deceived** her father, so that he couldn't find them. In order to keep anyone from Jacob's household from returning to claim his estate, Laban made a covenant with Jacob. They piled up a heap of stones like a watchtower ("**Mizpah**"), saying that each one covenanted to not pass over this "border" between them. Can we today make a Mizpah in our lives; a self-imposed limitation across which we covenant not to pass (not to do)?

Having departed from Laban and his men, Jacob now had to think about his brother, Esau, who might still be angry with him. Jacob camped with an angel escort at **Mahanaim**..."two camps" (32:2) and sent messengers to Esau to find out if he was still in trouble with his brother. Angels guarding Jacob and his family illustrates for us today that even when we are away from God's will, God, who knows the spirits of all flesh, will still be with us, when we communicate with Him through prayer. We see in **VaYetse**, as expressed by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "more than prayer changes God, it changes us. It lets us see, feel, know that 'God is in this place.'"

Anti-Semitism

Every year in our Passover Haggadah, we read of God's protection of His people from Anti-Semitism: "And also that nation whom they shall serve (Egypt) will I judge; and they shall afterwards go forth with great substance. And it is this same promise which has been the support of our ancestors, and of us also: for not one only has risen up against us, but in every generation there are some who rise up against us to annihilate us; but the Most Holy, blessed be He, has delivered us out of their hand. **Search and inquire what Laban, the Syrian, intended to do to our father Jacob; for Pharaoh decreed the destruction of the males only; but Laban intended to root out the whole**; as it is said: **A Syrian had nearly caused my father to perish...."**

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks quotes Amy Chua's prescription for Anti-Semitism: "In her fascinating book, World on Fire, Amy Chua argues that ethnic hatred will always be directed by the host society against any conspicuously successful minority. All three conditions must be present.

[1] The hated group must be a minority or people will fear to attack it.

[2] It must be successful or people will not envy it, merely feel contempt for it.

[3] It must be conspicuous or people will not notice it.

Jews tended to fit all three (categories). That is why they were hated. And it began with Jacob during his stay with Laban. He was a minority, outnumbered by Laban's family. He was successful, and it was conspicuous; you could see it by looking at his flocks.

What the sages are saying in the Haggadah now becomes clear. Pharaoh was a one-time enemy of the Jews, but **Laban exists, in one form or another, in age after age. The syndrome still exists today.**" As Amy Chua notes, "**Israel in the context of the Middle East is a conspicuously successful minority. It is a small country, a minority; it is successful, and it is conspicuously so.** Somehow, in a tiny country with few natural resources, it has outshone its neighbours. The result is **envy that becomes anger that becomes hate.** Where did it begin? With Laban."

Shabbat Shalom

