

# Beth Tephila Messianic Jewish Congregation

(Under same management for over 5778 years)

## SHABBAT SERVICE

December 2nd – 10:30 AM Lolo Community "Synagogue"  
12:30 PM Oneg Shabbat & In-Depth Torah Study

VaYishlach "And he sent..." -- Genesis 32:3 - 36:43

וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו אֶל-עֵשָׂו אָחִיו אֲרֻצָּה שְׂעִיר שָׂדֵה אֲדוֹם:

**Vayishlach Ya'akov mal'achim lefanav el-Esav achiv artsah Se'ir sdeh Edom.**

**And Jacob sent** messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

**Haftarah: Obadiah 12:18**

Then the house of Jacob will be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame.

But the house of Esau will be as stubble.

And they will set them on fire and consume them.

So that there will be no survivor of the house of Esau.

**B'rit Chadashah: Hebrews 11:13**

All these (including Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac) died in faith without having received the promises

but having seen them from a distance and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

**Following God...Trusting in Self**

Last week we saw Jacob pack up his wives, children and his flocks and flee Laban, heading home. In our generation, it is not uncommon for us decide to move our family from where we were living and travel back to our family home; back to "our roots." However what is uncommon for our generation is that the plans for our relocation don't usually come directly from God. "The Lord said to Jacob, 'Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you'"(31:3). Sensing that Uncle Laban would not take too kindly to his leaving with the wealth he had accumulated, Jacob sneaked away without leaving a forwarding address. One might ask the question of Jacob and of ourselves, if we're following God's leadership, can't we trust him? For Jacob and us the answer too often is that we believe we are following God, but we are really trusting in ourselves and relying on our own plans. Perhaps we can learn to follow God's leadership in our lives and fully trust Him at the same time by examining the choices made by Jacob and their consequences. We should also learn from Jacob's relationship with God that even when we make poor choices and do not trust God, God is still there, waiting for us to return to Him. While we might have to endure the consequences of our poor choices apart from His determinative will, we can always count on God being with us in the midst of the consequences. "I am with you and will keep you wherever you go..." He told Jacob (28:15), reiterating the same principle in Deuteronomy 31:6 and Hebrews 13:5: "**Let our character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He, Himself, has said, 'I**

**will never leave you, nor will I ever forsake you,' so that we confidently say, 'The lord is my Helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?'"**

Jacob decided to deceive Esau to obtain the birthright of the first-born son; a birthright promised to him by God, even before he was born ("the older shall serve the younger," 25:23). The consequence of not waiting for God to supply the birthright was the enmity of his brother, Esau. Jacob's mother, Rebekah, did not trust God to protect Jacob from Esau and sent him to her brother, Laban, ostensibly to find a wife. She would die before Jacob returned home, never meeting Rachel and Leah or her grandchildren. When God told Jacob to leave Laban and return home, Jacob fled, rather than confronting Laban and trusting God for protection. Now Jacob finds himself between Laban to the North-East and Esau to the South. He has deceived both of them and perceives that both wish to do him harm. He acknowledges that his camp is surrounded by angels for his protection. Jacob seems to trust God. He sends messengers to greet Esau, who now lives in Seir, the land given him by Isaac. Seir is quite a distance South and East from Jacob's home, so he would not have had to tell Esau **that after 20 years away, he is now coming home. But he does!**

In **Vayishlach**, Jacob sends messengers to greet Esau. When the messengers return with the news that Esau and 400 men are coming for a visit, does Jacob continue to trust God for protection? Yes.....and no! Jacob was so "afraid and distressed" that he divided his people and animals into two companies for defense.

His plan was for one company to escape if the other company was attacked. If Esau had planned to divide and conquer, Jacob had already accomplished the division for him. But then, after formulating his own plan, Jacob devotedly comes to God.

Jacob's prayer was straight-forward and totally heartfelt. He acknowledged his place in God's plan for the Jewish people. He acknowledged God's "chesed," His covenantal loving-kindness and faithfulness to him. He acknowledged his total dependence on God. His humble prayer of supplication spoke God's words back to Him, asking God (for the sake of His promises to him) to deliver him. Jacob's prayer can also be viewed today as a model prayer for us!

**"The Prayer of Jacob"** by Gustave Doré



Gen 32:11 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.

## Jacob's Plans

Plan A for Jacob was to send Esau a "minchah," a tribute offering to try to appease him and gain his acceptance. Jacob sent Esau 580 animals as tribute. Rabbinic thought is that Jacob was showing Esau his wealth in animals to emphasize that Jacob had not taken any land from Esau and had wealth only in animals. While this Rabbinic ploy might have preserved Jacob for a short time, Jacob would soon part company with Esau and settle in the "promised land." Later with the death of Isaac, Esau would again be united with Jacob for the burial. If Esau had not understood that the land of the birthright belonged to Jacob, there could have been violence at their reunion. Jacob instructed his servants to split up into five separate herds, keeping an interval between herds to make them appear to be an even larger tribute.



Plan B was also defensive. Just in case God did not protect him, Jacob had his family make a possibly dangerous night crossing of the Jabbok River to get his family away from the rest of the two companies of servants and animals, putting the River between his family and Esau. Jacob had prayed and made his own plans. Now God would test the faith of Jacob, as he tested the faith of Abraham and Isaac.

## God Tests Jacob



"And Jacob remained alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak." Genesis 32:24



"And when he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated, while he wrestled with him until daybreak." Genesis 32:25

Without servants, family, or tribute offerings for protection, God provided Jacob with an adversary more immediate than the approach of Esau. God tested Jacob's persistence, his tenacity, and, as the hours passed, his heart to receive God's blessing. Very little in scripture is said about Jacob's fight with this "man," except that they wrestled all night long. At some point during the struggle, Jacob realized with whom he was fighting and asked for God's blessing, refusing to give up until he received the blessing. Rabbinic thought concludes that the "man" was actually the angel of Esau, who would always oppose the Jewish people just like the descendants of Esau. The implication is that with tenacity and persistence, the Jewish people can overcome those who oppose them. However, scripture quite clearly states that Jacob had striven with God ("**Elohim**") (32:28). Jacob even named the place "**Peniel**" ("the face of God") because.... "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved" (32:30). Jacob had prayed for "**nasal**" (deliverance) from Esau and his life had been preserved ("**nasal**") after seeing God face to face (a figurative expression meaning "in openness and friendship").

How does one engage in a physical struggle with God and overcome Him, unless God allows it? But just to help Jacob remember that he did not actually physically defeat God, Jacob is given a dislocated hip, which causes him to limp and remember the encounter with every step. Jacob has

learned that his persistence and tenacity prevail when he struggles **with** God, rather than **against** adversaries.

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר עוֹד שְׂמִי כִּי אִם-יִשְׂרָאֵל

Vayomer lo Ya'akov ye'amer od shimcha ki im-Yisra'el

And He said, " your name will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel...

" Genesis 32:28

## From Jacob to Israel

Jacob had already received the birthright and blessing of Isaac. He had already received God's promise to protect, provide for, and return Jacob to the land of his inheritance and give him descendants. Now, just before Esau arrived with 400 men, God changed his name to "Israel," which means "God fights" because ..."you have striven with God ("Elohim") and with men and have prevailed" (32:28). If Jacob could prevail with God, Israel (because God would be doing the fighting) could prevail against Esau and his descendants. The example for us is clear: In our struggles against The Adversary, we must allow God to fight for us! "If God is for us, who can stand against us!" (Romans 8:31).

We recall when God changed Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah, they were then called by their new names exclusively. Not so with Jacob, who is sometimes called Israel and other times Jacob. Can you speculate why? Could it be that sometimes Jacob (the "heal-catcher" and schemer) trusts in himself, while at other times, Israel allows God to fight for him?

**"The Meeting of Jacob and Esau" by Gustave Doré**



Gen 33:3-4 ...bowed himself to the ground seven times, ... And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept.

Jacob saw that Esau and his 400 men were approaching. He again went into defensive (non-trusting) mode. He prioritized the value of his wives, maids, and children, putting those of lesser value to him up front towards Esau, while protecting those he valued most by putting them towards the rear. The consequences for the relationships of this dysfunctional family will become apparent in the Torah portion for next week. Probably to Jacob's surprise, Esau ran to him, kissed him, and wept tears of joy to again see his brother. Still in defensive, diplomatic mode, Jacob introduced his family, calling himself "your servant" and Esau "my lord." Rabbis speculate that Dinah was left out of the introductions, so that she could be hidden from Esau. Perhaps Esau would have wanted to marry Dinah and have her produce children, who would oppose the Jewish people. After their reunion, Jacob diplomatically refused Esau's offer to accompany Jacob to Seir, making the excuse that they would be traveling too slowly for Esau and his men. Jacob lied to Esau, saying that he would slowly follow Esau South. Instead, Jacob turned West and headed for Succoth (booths), traveling into the

"promised land" and arriving at Shechem. There he purchased a piece of land (just like Abraham), which indicated that he intended to settle there. Jacob erected an altar to God, calling it "el-Elohe-Israel" ("a mighty God is the God of Israel"). This is the place where Joseph's bones would later be buried, when God's people returned from Egypt (Joshua 24:32). However, Shechem may not have been where God wanted Jacob to settle. Genesis 28:20-21 records Jacob's vow to return to make Bethel God's house. One might speculate whether a consequence of Jacob living in Shechem was the incident involving Dinah, Simeon, and Levi.

## A Violation of the "Prime Directive"

Dinah was a daughter of Jacob with Leah. She was first mentioned in 30:21. Jacob had other daughters as mentioned in 37:35, 46:7, and 46:15, but only Dinah is mentioned by name. This is probably because of her participation in **Chapter 34**. Dinah was visiting "the daughters of the land," when Shechem, the son of Hamor from whom Jacob purchased his land, saw her, grabbed her, and raped her. Afterwards, Shechem asked his father to visit Jacob to pay the bride price, so Shechem could marry Dinah. When Jacob heard of the rape, his sons were away with their flocks, so Jacob kept silent. Rabbis wonder whether Jacob would have remained silent if Dinah had been the daughter of Rachel. When the sons returned, they were very angry that such a disgraceful thing had been done in Israel. This was the first time "Israel" was used as a nation. Hamor told the sons that Shechem loved Dinah....and besides it would be a good money making enterprise for their tribes to intermarry. Shechem stated that "the land shall be open before you." He did not realize two major factors would prohibit such a union: 1) God had already given Jacob and his descendants all the land. 2) God's prime directive for the Jewish people was to never intermarry with Canaanites and worship their gods. However, Jacob's sons answered Hamor with deceit. (Where could they have possibly learned deceit?) They told Hamor that if he could convince the men of his tribe to circumcise themselves, they would be acceptable for the daughters of Jacob. Hamor did convince his men, telling them that they would acquire all of Jacob's wealth. Then three days after their circumcision, when the swelling and pain would be at its maximum, Simeon and Levi used their swords to kill every male in Shechem, also killing Hamor and Shechem. They retrieved Dinah from the house of Shechem.



"Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword....and they killed Hamor and his son, Shechem.... and took Dinah from Shechem's house." Genesis 34:25,26



Interestingly, we will later observe God's directive of war against all the ungodly Canaanite tribes that lived in the land He gave to the sons of Jacob in Deuteronomy 7:2 and 20:16. God's prime directive was to eliminate any possibility that His people could be "infected" by the gods and detestable practices of the surrounding Canaanite tribes. Even today for the same reasons, we are told not to become "unequally yoked" in marriage or business relationships. (2nd Corinthians 6:4)

## Jacob's Vow To God Fulfilled

Back in 28:19-22, Jacob vowed that when God protected him on his journey and returned him safely back to the land, he would make Bethel God's house. Now God directed Jacob to travel 15 miles South to Bethel, which translated from Hebrew means "house of God," build an altar to God, and live there. Before departing, Jacob sought to sanctify his family in order to make a fresh start before God. He had everyone surrender their foreign gods as a recommitment to God, and God brought Jacob safely back to Bethel. At Bethel, Jacob built an altar to institute public worship. God appeared to Jacob, reconfirming his name change to "Israel" and reconfirming the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob and to his descendants.

In **Chapter 35** the deaths of Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, Rachel, and Isaac are recorded. As Jacob traveled from Bethel towards Bethlehem, Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin and was buried. Today in Israel, Rachel's tomb is a popular place to visit. Isaac died at 180 year of age, the oldest of the Patriarchs. The term "gathered to his people" guarantees an afterlife. Isaac went to join those relatives who had proceeded him in death and now were awaiting him. Of course, the guarantee of an afterlife is ours as well!

# SHABBAT SHALOM



**Chanukah is coming! Two more weeks!**