

Beth Tephila Messianic Jewish Congregation
(Under same management for over 5786 years)

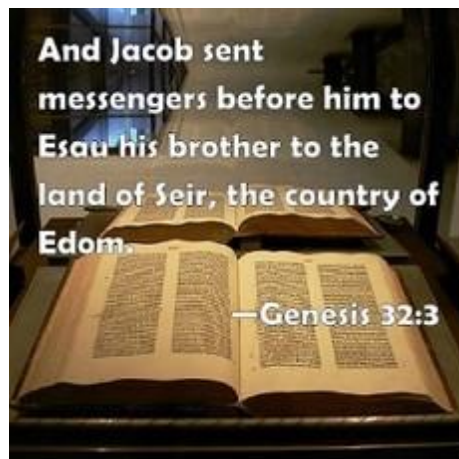
SHABBAT SERVICE

December 6th – 10:30AM 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 שָׂרָה אֲדוֹם:

Vayishlach Ya'akov mal'achim l'fanav el-Esav achiv
And Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau
artsah Se'ir s'deh Edom.
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 while working for him, **Jacob sneaked away without leaving a forwarding address.**

Discussion Question: 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** by **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?'**"

Consequernces of working our own plans: 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). **For Jacob**, the **consequences** of not waiting for God to supply the birthright **were years of working for Laban** and **the enmity of his brother, Esau.** **For Jacob's mother, Rebekah**, who did not trust God to protect Jacob from Esau but sent him to her brother, Laban, ostensibly to find a wife, **Rebekah would die before Jacob returned home**, never meeting Rachel and Leah nor 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 coming up towards him from the South. **He has deceived both of them and perceives that both wish to do him harm.** Jacob acknowledges that **his camp is surrounded by angels for his protection.** Jacob seems to trust God. He sent messengers to greet the on coming Esau, who now lived in Seir, the land given to him by Isaac. Seir is quite a distance South and East from Jacob's home, so Jacob would not have had to tell Esau that **after 20 years away, he is now going back home. Instead, Jacob lets Esau think that Jacob intends to follow Esau back to Edom.**

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! [Just like us] Jacob was so "afraid and distressed" that he divided his people and animals into two companies for defense. **Jacob's 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 in prayer to God: **Jacob formulated his own plans and then asked God to bless the plans Jacob had made.****

Contextual Thinking: Another commentator began by saying, "As a father of two young boys," (applying his experience in today's world to the biblical context) and then stated, "In this parasha, Esav had every right to be angry with his brother, Yaakov. Yaakov bought (a transaction) Esav's birthright for a bowl of pottage, **deceived his father into giving him his blessing**, (that went with the purchased birthright that Esau despised at the time) **and then made off to another land with the help** (at the command) **of his mother. By these actions, "supplanter"** (follower - birth order) **[When the simple sense of a word makes common sense, take no other sense.] seems like a worthy meaning for Yaakov's name!"**

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," God's covenantal loving-kindness and faithfulness to him. He acknowledged his total dependence on God. Jacob's 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 was a **strategic plan**. Jacob sent 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 ploy might have preserved Jacob for a short time, Jacob would soon part company with Esau and settle in the "promised land." [**note God's timing:** While Jacob spent all those years away from the land of his inheritance, Esau traveled to the land promised to him by Isaac and became wealthy there. So by the time Esau met Jacob, Esau felt no anger towards Jacob.] 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 the animals appear to be an even larger perceived tribute.



Plan B was **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 for God's protection, but he also **made his own plans**.

In whom did Jacob trust, God or himself? If Jacob fully trusted God to preserve him, as God had previously promised him, why would Jacob make his own plans to deceive Esau? God would test the faith of Jacob, as he had tested the faith of Abraham and Isaac!

Discussion Question: Does God ever test our faith by putting an "adversary" in front of our plans?

God Tests Jacob



And Jacob remained alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.
Genesis 32:24 **Rembrandt van Rijn**



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.

Discussion Question: 1) **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 (works = salvation). Scripture quite clearly states that Jacob had **"striven with God"** ("**Elohim**" the plural form) (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").

Another commentator: 2) The next thing that happens I have often wondered about. The text tells us that "Jacob was left alone. And a figure wrestled with him until the break of dawn" (Gen 32:25). As perplexing as it sounds, the only real fact we are presented with is that **a figure or angel**, seemingly **out of nowhere**, simply approaches Yaakov and immediately they wrestle! **Where did the figure come from? Yaakov did**

not stop wrestling with the figure until he blessed him. The figure blesses Yaakov by telling him, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have struggled with God and with man, and have prevailed"

How do we find a Theophany presented in scripture? A man appears from nowhere, says or does something only God could say or do, and then vanishes. Could this angel be a theophany?

Application: Can we struggle with God through prayer? After the struggle, can we show our faith in Him by yielding to him, rather than making our own plans? How does one engage in a physical struggle with God and overcome Him, unless God allows it?

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 struggling against adversaries.

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאמָר עוֹד שִׁמְךָ 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, 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).

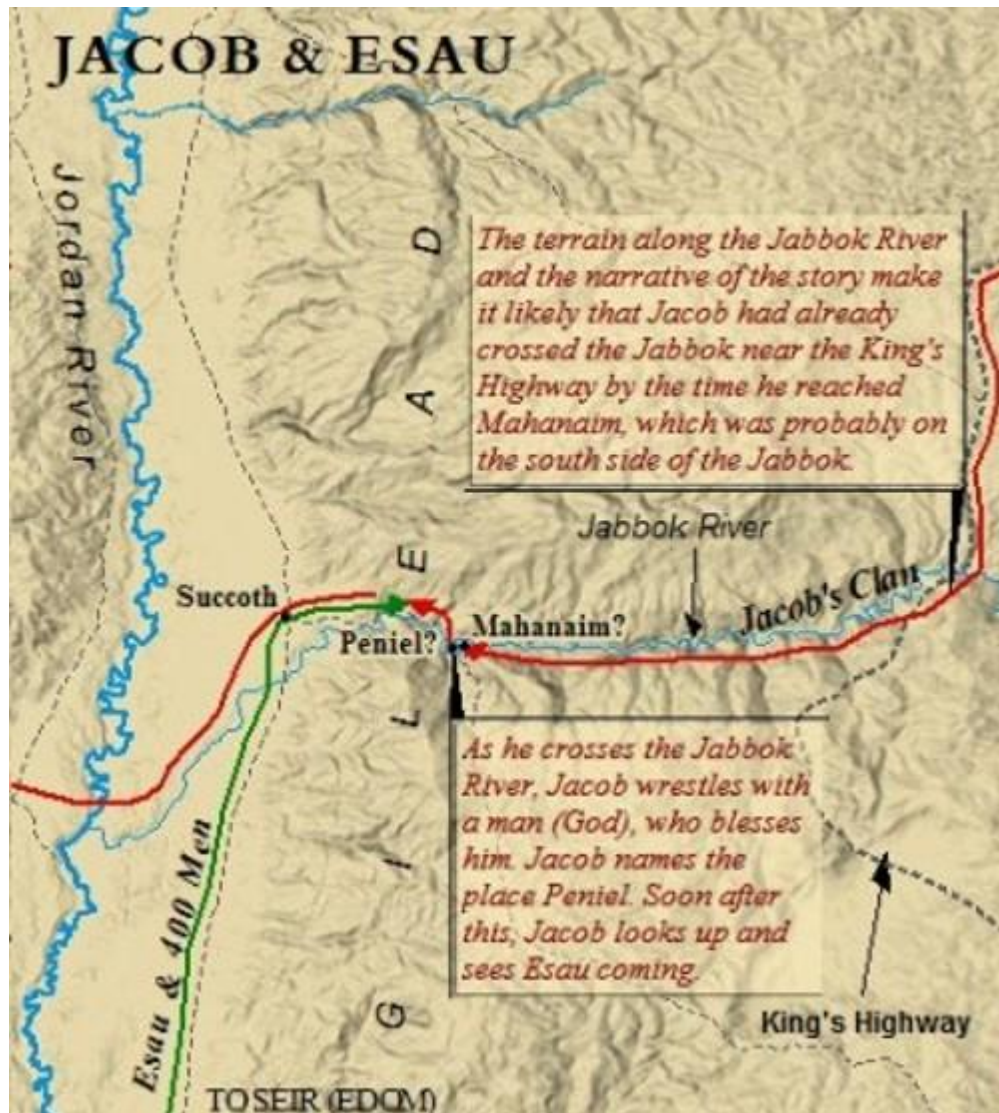
Discussion Question: We recall when God changed Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah, they were then called by their new names exclusively. Not so with Jacob, who is sometimes called Israel and other times Jacob. Can you speculate why? Could it be that sometimes Jacob (the "heal-catcher," "follower," and passive schemer) trusts in himself, while at other times, Israel prays and allows God to fight for him? Should we take time to struggle with God through prayer and allow God to formulate His plan for our deliverance? Could Jacob have allowed God to have provided him the birthright promised to him without Jacob's deception? Could Rebecca have allowed God's promise of Jacob being His "chosen one" to keep Jacob from harm? We would do well to trust God by remembering that God's will cannot be thwarted!



Jacob saw that Esau and his 400 men were approaching. He again went into **defensive (non-trusting) mode**. He prioritized the value of **each** 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, illustrating for each wife and maid where they stood in respective value to Jacob. The **consequences for the relationships of this dysfunctional family** will become apparent in the Torah portion for next week.

Esau arrived!! Probably to Jacob's surprise, Esau ran to him, kissed him, and wept tears of joy to again see his brother. Yet 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 armed 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**. **Should Jacob have returned all the way back home? One might speculate whether a consequence of (passive) Jacob living in Shechem was the incident involving Dinah, Simeon, and Levi.**

Discussion Question: Can someone pray for God's will to be accomplished, yet still make one's own plans? How does that work out? Can there be consequences for making our own plans and asking God to bless them?

A Violation of the "Prime Directive"

Dinah was the daughter of Jacob with Leah. She was first mentioned in **Genesis 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 (passively) kept silent**. Rabbinic speculation questions whether Jacob would have remained silent if Dinah had been the daughter of Rachel. When Jacob's 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, the 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 for 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). Yet **Jacob's passivity allowed Simeon and Levi to make and execute their own plans.**

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 (Rachel still had Laban's household 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 years of age, the oldest of the Patriarchs. The term **"gathered to his people" guarantees an afterlife.** Isaac went to join those relatives who had preceded him in death and now were awaiting him. Today, the guarantee of an afterlife belongs to **all God's people!**

SHABBAT SHALOM

**This & Next Shabbat,
Chanukah Candles Given to those who need them.
Family Pictures will be taken with Chanukiahs at Chanukah
Shabbat, December 20th**



We Pray for Israel at War
May they end the EVIL that is Hamas & Hezbollah