

TORAH PORTION
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"TRUE ISRAELITES AND THE STRUGGLES OF LIFE"¹

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Last week we spoke of the importance of taking responsibility and bearing the consequences of our own actions. We saw how Jacob was in great need of a special and personal encounter with the Most High. He needed it so that he could survive the hard path laid before him (i.e., the way to Charan and the long stay at Laban's house).

This week's portion moves us forward in Jacob's life story. It actually deals with events that took place more than twenty years after he had that personal night experience at Bethel.

In the natural, one would expect that from now on Jacob would have a smooth, easy and comfortable life. After all, did he not fully pay for his actions? Wasn't over twenty years of hardships and struggles at Laban's house enough? Well, most of you who are already familiar with this week's Torah portion, know that Jacob's struggles did not stop at all.

In this commentary, I would like to deal with one very significant struggle Jacob needed to go through before meeting his brother Esau. (Gen. 32:25-33) After more than twenty years in his "diaspora", Jacob was on his way back home, back to his father's house. There was only one small problem which was not dealt with while outside the Promised Land: Meeting with Esau in person!

After hearing that Esau was coming towards him with 400 warriors, Jacob panicked! He was very anxious as he did not know whether he was going to make it or not, even though God was the One who called him back to his homeland (See Gen. 31:3, 11-13, 32:10)!

After he had sent messengers with all kinds of gifts for his brother, Jacob took his two wives, the two female servants, and his eleven sons and crossed over the ford of Jabbok (Gen. 32:14-23). While alone at the Jabbok ford (or: "Jabbok pass"), Genesis 32:25 records that "a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day." Who was that "man"? While in the original Hebrew, "eesh" or "Iysh" (A male person, a "man"), could point to any (regular) "man", the English translations usually spell it as "men", and rightfully so! We know for sure that this "man" was a very special "man"!

In Genesis 32:31, we see that even Jacob understood that the one with whom he had just struggled was "Elohim" (God)! This special event at the Jabbok pass is later mentioned in the Scriptures and once again, it relates to this "man" as both the "Angel" of God and God Himself (See Hosea 12:3-5)!

It's time again for our short weekly Hebrew lesson. Where did this special encounter take place? At the "Jabbok pass" (Gen. 32:23). The Hebrew "Yabbok" (2999) probably comes from "Bakak" (1238), which is a primitive root with the following meanings: *To pour out, i.e. to empty, figuratively, to depopulate; by analogy, to spread out (as a fruitful vine), make empty, make void.*

What did this "man" come to do down there at the valley? He came to "wrestle" with Jacob (Gen. 32:25). "Wrestled with him" reads in Hebrew as "Vayeavek". "Vayeavek" probably comes from "Avak" (79), which is a primitive root with the following meanings: *Light particles (as volatile), small dust,*

powder, to float away (as vapor), to be dust, i.e. grapple; wrestle.

Since creation, do you know of any “man” who fits the above description? A “man” who left His heavenly dwelling, came down to earth (“the Valley”), and completely poured out and emptied Himself for mankind? Do you know of any “man” in human history who clothed Himself with flesh (“Dust”) and came to “wrestle” with “dust” that He Himself created, so that they could gain their lost glory back? Indeed, the Gospel of the Kingdom is the greatest LOVE STORY ever told!

So far we’ve dealt with the “man” in our story, but what about Jacob? What did Jacob do? He struggled with the “man” and—“Prevailed” (Gen. 32:26, 29). “*And prevailed*” (Gen. 32:29), reads in Hebrew as “*Vatuchal*.” It comes from “*Yachol*” (3201), which is a primitive root bearing the following meanings: *To be able, literally (can, could) or morally (may, might), attain, can, could, endure, might, overcome, have power, prevail, still, suffer.*

That night, deep in the dark valley, Jacob was so desperate that he did not let go of that “man!” He knew that in his circumstances, he had nothing to lose! He decided to take this (maybe once in a life time) opportunity and win/overcome, even if it would cost him something dear! Yes! He was ready to suffer for the prize which awaited him (See Gen. 32:26, 32). What was the prize Jacob received for prevailing in that struggle? The prize was the receiving of a very special blessing! And what was this very special blessing? A name change! Jacob received a new name from that moment on, but not just any name! He was named “ISRAEL”(Gen. 32:28-29)!!

The term “Israel” (3478) is a combination of two Hebrew words: “*Sarah*” (8280) and “*El*” (410). “*Sarah*” comes from a primitive root which means: *to prevail, have powers (as a prince)*. “*El*” has the connection to “*Ayil*” (352) which has the connotation of strength, anything strong; like a chief (politically), a ram (from his strength), and an oak or other strong tree as adjective: mighty. Thus, it fits especially the Almighty God! (But used also of any deity).

Based on the above, the term “Israel” describes Jacob who struggled with God, prevailed and thus, has the power to be a “*Sar*” (or “*Prince*”) of God and actually rule as (or with) God! And, as most of you know, according to God’s Word, we—true followers of Israel’s Messiah—are *all* part of the “*Olive Tree*” (Rom. 11). We are all a part of the “*Commonwealth of ISRAEL*” (Eph. 2). Yes! In Yeshua, we are all “*ISRAELITES*”!

Speaking of struggles, are they not an integral part of our life here on planet earth? In my opinion, struggles are the direct consequence of Adam’s fall in the Garden! Mankind, or Adam’s descendants, lost their former glory and since then struggle to gain it back! Some do it while fully aware of the origins of life’s struggles/hardships and some do it without even knowing the origins! Thus, some are struggling for the wrong cause (i.e. for the pleasures of the flesh; so they can somewhat ease the pain involved in living in such a fallen world), while others are struggling for the right cause (i.e., “*wrestling with Yeshua*” to get His blessings/their promised “*new name*”!)

The question we all should ask ourselves is: Where are we in all of this? As struggles cannot be avoided, nor prevented (as long as we live here in this fallen state), what are we really struggling for? Are we desperate enough to hold on to Yeshua’s garments, not letting Him go until He blesses us? Or do we just want to give up? Or maybe we continue to struggle for the wrong cause?

While we are still in this “earthly suit”, may He grant us the GRACE to continue struggling for the right cause, by the power of His Holy Spirit that dwells in us!

Rami