11-20-26 to Roeh Israel Abilene – *Vayetzei* (and he went out)
Torah Portion; Genesis 28:10-32:2
Haftarah: Hosea 11:7-14:9
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: John 1:43-51

Being Israel Means Overcoming Adversity

Central question of this message: Will you prevail over the trials of these times as Yacov did – by having faith in G-d?

We are in parasha *Vayetzei.* This word means "and he went out," referring to Yacov.

Gen 28:10-13

> 10 Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward
> Haran. 11 And he came to a certain place and spent the night
> there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones
> of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that
> place. 12 And he had a dream, and behold, 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.

10 וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שָׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חָרָנָה׃
And went out Jacob from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran.
3318 3290 884 1980 2771

11 וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם וַיָּלֶן שָׁם כִּי־ בָא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried all night, there because was set; the sun
6293 4725 3885 8033 3588 935 8121

וַיִּקַּח מֵאַבְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם וַיָּשֶׂם מְרַאֲשֹׁתָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב
and he took of the stones of that place, and put his pillows, them for and lay down to sleep.
3947 68 4725 7760 4763 9999 7901

בַּמָּקוֹם הַהוּא׃
in place that
4725 1931

12 וַיַּחֲלֹם וְהִנֵּה סֻלָּם מֻצָּב אַרְצָה וְרֹאשׁוֹ מַגִּיעַ
And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to
2492 2009 5551 5324 776 7218 5060

הַשָּׁמָיְמָה וְהִנֵּה מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ׃
heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.
8064 2009 4397 430 5927 3381 871a

The passage begins with the statement, “and he went out.” In my view, that particular translation seems a little bit understated. Actually, given the context of the rest of the passage, it might better be translated: “and he ran for his life.”

Recall that once Yitzhak correctly blessed Yacov with the blessing he had intended (wrongfully) to give to Esav, Esav took a vow to wait until Yitzhak’s death, then he would go kill Yacov. That was especially true since Esav’s blessing was a bit more of a prediction of calamity than a blessing.

And remember that at the time of these blessings Yitzhak was very old, blind, and was sure that his death was near.

And it was in this condition that Yitzhak sent Yacov back to the house of Laban in what is today Syria, to get a wife from his kinsmen – as opposed to a wife from among the pagans in the area where he was living.

Did Yacov believe that his father would be alive when he returned with his bride? Probably not. It is appropriate for a son to be at his father's side at death, but with his brother poised on the brink of murder at this time, maybe the safer course of action for Yacov was going far away to get a bride.

And the urgency of Yacov in getting as far away from his father's house as possible in the shortest time is somewhat evident in the statement we find about the place he chose to rest his head for the night.

Gen 28:10-11

> 10 Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11 And he came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones

of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place.

Why does someone travel into the night, and not stop traveling earlier so as to find a more suitable spot to spend the night? Why stop in a high spot strewn with stones and not choose a nice valley with more comfortable soil? Why would he not at least stop in the town nearby – known as Luz – and find a bed there?

The Sages suggest that Yacov intended to get up very early and continue his journey away from his brother, and the gates to the city would not be open as early as he wanted and would delay him in leaving. And when you are running for your life, you stop to rest where you find yourself at the end of your ability to run. For Yacov, that turned out to be a high, rocky place strewn with stones.

Yacov's soul was troubled greatly as he fled his brother's wrath. We see that the passage as well, but it is somewhat hidden. It is found in the Hebrew of the words translated as a "certain place."

The Hebrew there is *v'yipga bmakom.* It can mean to simply "accidentally show up at a place." And many choose that interpretation.

But the root *poga* also can also mean “pray intensely.” The Hebrew suggests that Yacov wasn’t just lying down to sleep, he was praying with great intensity.

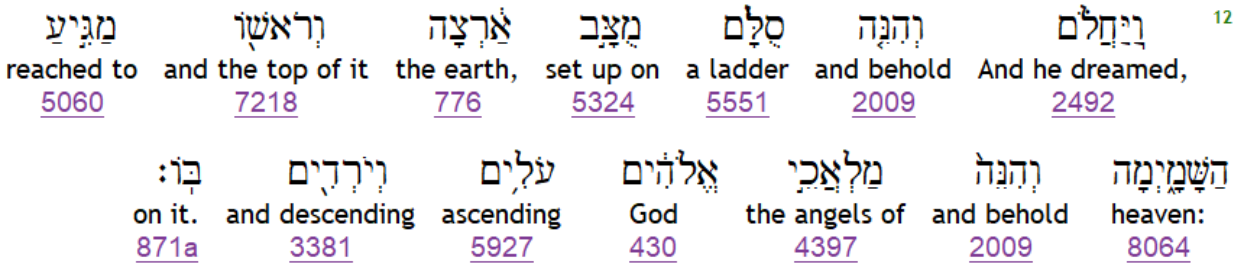
Let’s take a look at the vision itself.

Gen 28:12-17

> 12 And he had a dream, and behold, 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. 13 And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. 14 Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." 16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." 17 And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is

this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

I want to focus on what was translated "ladder." I am unsatisfied with that translation. The Hebrew word there is *sulom*.



The pre-Babylonian pictographic Hebrew word *sulom* carries with it the concepts of "support," "authority" and "abundance."

Taken together, putting these concepts into a sentence, we can see a meaning of "that which supports the authority," or "that thing upon which the abundant authority stands."

Sulom is found at Strong's 5551, which then refers back to Strongs 5549, as the root. The root at 5549 is *sulal*, which means "to mound-up, to exalt."

A very similar word in Hebrew is *selah* found at Strongs 5553, and it means "lofty," and "fortress." [Not the same Hebrew word at the end of

some psalms, which bids you to stop for a moment and reflect upon what was just said].

This seems to indicate that what was seen was not really a "ladder" at all, but something that is a strong tower, a fortress, a rock, reaching to heaven itself. And *malachim Adonai* ("angels") were on it. This is one of the few times that *malach Adonai* can be reasonably translated as "angel."

The common rendering of "Jacob's ladder" in popular art is of a rather flimsy ladder reaching into the clouds.



The angels are depicted with wings to fly. And most are flying, but some are on the ladder. Why would angels who can fly need a ladder? And

since it is depicted as such a flimsy structure, I can well see why no angel would wish to use it. I certainly wouldn't.

I believe this depiction is erroneous. Hebrew grammar really doesn't give a picture of angels climbing up and down on a ladder.

It says the angels, *"olim v yordim bo"*. A better translation might be "rising up (being exalted) and flowing downward **in Him**." *Olim* is from the same root as *olah* (the smoke of the sacrifice rises as the *olah*). We know that the smoke of the sacrifices on the altar symbolize our prayers going to heaven. *Yordim* has the same root as the name of the river Jordan. It means "to flow down." We will deal with the concept of "in Him" in a little while.

It is important to note that the Almighty is standing upon this tower, fortress, rock, - which is clearly the conduit between earth and heaven - and is announcing to Yacov that He is G-d.

Then, a prophecy is given.

Gen 28:13-15

> 13 And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. 14 Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

This is a recap of the promises given to Abraham in Gen 12:7, Gen 13:14-18, Gen 18:18, and Gen 22:18.

Yacov's prayers were answered, in a vision crafted just for him, so that he would know that the supernatural favor that had been granted to his grandfather Abraham, and to his father Yitzhak, would be likewise granted to him.

Gen 28:16-19

> 16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." 17 And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than

> the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." 18 So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on its top. 19 And he called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz.

Yacov was now assured that he would not die, but would live, and his children would one day inherit this land from none other than G-d Himself.

But there is more we can learn about this “ladder,” or tower, or strong fortress. It is revealed in a conversation Yeshua had with Nathaniel.

John 1:43-51

> 43 The next day He purposed to go forth into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, "Follow Me." 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." 46 And Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him," Come and see." 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him,

and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" 48 Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." 49 Nathanael answered Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel." 50 Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these." 51 And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

The phrase “under the fig tree” is a Hebrew idiom. It can mean engaging in a time of study of Torah, or a time of meditation and prayer. In actuality, it has nothing to do with a tree at all.

Combine that with Mat 18:10 and Rev 8:4, which tell us that people have an assigned angel, who carries their prayers to the throne. Acts 12:14 seems to indicate that the angel of a person looks like that person.

I think it clear that when Nathaniel was studying today’s Torah portion, he was also praying for some enlightenment on what this passage actually meant. I think he was asking for a sign as well as to who the Messiah might be, and also that he would live to see His face.

When Yeshua said what He said to Nathaniel, it was the sign that he had asked for, and he knew immediately that he was staring into the face of the Messiah of Israel.

So, we now can see upon what (or whom) those angels ascend and descended. The answer to that question was already suggested by the phrase, “ascending and descending in Him.” That might have been the very analysis that Nathaniel was working through when he was called.

Let’s simplify the question. Who is the conduit between heaven and earth then… and today? It is Yeshua. His proclamation may have double meaning, as we see from another oft-quoted verse.

John 14:6-7

> "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.

Many sweet Christians have used this verse to stand for the proposition that if you don’t believe in the redemptive work of Jesus, that you are going to Hell. I think their interpretation is legitimate, but I think they might be missing the deeper significance of what He said.

I think He was telling us once again that He is the conduit between heaven and Earth, and it is because of Him that the angels can move freely between those realms to bring our prayers to the throne of G-d, and get the answers back in return. And further, that the angels which carry out G-d's judgments on the Earth do so with the authority of the Lamb of G-d.

Yes, our prayers come to the father through the conduit between heaven and Earth – Yeshua. Our redemption from the penalty of sin also comes through Yeshua. He is the connection between Heaven and Earth.

Let's apply what we have seen in this passage to our lives today. What was Yacov doing? Running for his life.

The Jewish faith originated with Abraham. He is known as the "father of those who have faith" because he followed what G-d told him to do without demanding an explanation, or seeing the outcome in advance. He left all that was familiar to him, and went to a place he had never been, to follow a G-d he could not see, and to become a wonderer, living in tents in a foreign land. But we are not known as "Abraham."

The single most iconic prophetic act reflecting the coming Messiah is the "Akeidah Yitzhak" (the binding of Isaac). Abraham's son Isaac lay

himself down upon the altar, one he had himself built, to become the sacrifice. But we are not known as "Yitzhak."

Much later, Moses, in yet another series of miracles of messianic significance, instituted the Passover, then led our people out of a land of slavery to hear G-d's voice at the mountain. Moses wrote for us the Torah, fashioned the Mishkan (Tabernacle), showed us how to live-out G-d's instructions, and then eventually led us to the border of the Promised Land. But we are not known as "Moses."

We who are joined to the One true G-d are known by the name Yacov will receive in next week's parasha - "Israel." What makes Jacob (Yacov) such a hero that we as a nation should forever bear his name?

As you read this week's parashah as well as that for next week, you will see a pattern. Yacov's life is anything but calm, and serene. He does have the blessings of G-d in wives and children, and in flocks and servants.

Let's remember all the troubles he has seen which appear in the next two parashot. He worked seven years to pay Laban for his daughter Rachel, but Laban tricked him and gave him Leah instead. Then Yacov worked another seven years for Rachel.

When Laban inquired as to how Yacov might be compensated for pasturing Laban's flocks, Yacov said he could receive the animals born with mottled, spotted or black coats as his payment.

Then Laban tried to prevent any such animals from being born by removing all the males which had any spots or darkness in their coats before the time of breeding.

Laban dealt treacherously with Yacov in all important ways, while pretending to be his protector and benefactor. And remember Laban was one of his own people.

Then Yacov is running from Laban, because he thinks Laban will do evil to him if he doesn't flee in secret.

For 14 years Yacov had no place he can feel safe. He had no peace.

Maybe you are not being pursued by someone intent upon taking your life. I have experienced that. I can tell you that it will focus your attention on one thing – survival.

But maybe you can identify a situation where you believed that everything important was being taken from you, and you had no future. There may

have been times when you just wanted to run away. Maybe that is true right now.

When you are facing great trials, you often feel you are at the end of your rope. You have tried everything you know, and none of it has succeeded.

You feel as if the place where you lie down is littered with sharp stones. Even your pillow is cold and hard.

At those times, you will have two paths ahead.

One is surrender to the difficulty; and you will become a victim.

Another path is to trust in the L-rd. That is not surrender, that is a recognition that you are in His hands.

Notice that the times of the closest encounters with G-d in Yacov's life seemed to happen when he faced danger from every direction.

He was being treated treacherously by Laban, his own kin. He was being hunted by Essav, his own twin brother. And each time when Yacov's heart was troubled, because it seemed that no good was happening to him,

but all evil was coming against him… he prayed fervently. And G-d met him in those prayers.

Since the time of Yacov we as a people have been attacked by evil. The nations of this world are happy to carry-out Satan's bidding, to afflict us. They have tried in every generation to kill us all, and that way to stop what G-d has planned for us to do in this world – to advance His kingdom and his redemptive plan.

Yacov was beset on every side with evil, but he was a survivor. He always found a way to continue forward.

The oppression we have faced as a nation has included being conquered by the Selucid empire, the Romans, and even the Muslims. We have been chased and murdered throughout Europe and Asia. We have fled from many countries. Antisemitism is rising once again all over Europe, and even in America.

Some of my ancestors fled oppression of the Russians in the Ukraine and Poland in the 1880s. Before then, others of my ancestors fled England in the 1600s as they purged the Jews from their land. Many of my family perished in the extermination camps in Nazi-dominated Europe.

I personally was beaten almost every day as a child – by other children who hated me. And as an adult, there have been people in the churches who have been very ugly to me and have cast me out.

How do our people react to these evils? We fall on our knees before G-d and pray. And then we get back up and get busy doing what we were designed to do – to be light in a darkening world. We survive, and continue.

Yacov did not simply surrender to the attacks. He turned to G-d and then he did what he believed was right to do at that time. To be so completely grafted-into Israel doesn't merely mean that you are called by that name, it means you are to do what we as a people have always done – never give in to evil, never be a victim, but rather pray, arise, and survive.

Does G-d have a plan for your life? Are you a part of His plan of salvation for this world? Of course you are. You are unique. There has never been anyone in this world like you, who can do what you can do. G-d has a task for you to do that nobody else can do.

I urge you to shake-off the cart-ropes of fear and worry about the troubles around you. They will divert you from your mission. They will keep you

looking over your shoulder for the pursuer rather than looking forward for your destiny.

If G-d wishes for you to be alive, and to work for His kingdom, know that no man can kill you. If G-d has accomplished His will by what you have done in your life, and is ready to draw you to His side in paradise, then no man can save you.

Know this, my sweetest friends. You are safe in His hands. Cast your eyes up to the hills. Where does your help come from? It comes from the L-rd.

Now, as Israel has always done, get up from that field of sharp stones. Get on your feet, fellow soldiers. We have a mission that G-d has given us. We are not to live as a victim, but we will rise and survive another day to show a darkening world the light that is within us.