

Vayetze **And (Jacob) Went Out**
Torah: Genesis 28:10-32:2 (3)
Haftarah: Hosea 11:7-4:9(10)
Brit Chadashah: John 1:10-51

Our passage today, deals with Jacob's journey to Padan-Aram to procure a wife and with his return to Canaan with a substantial family. It does not mention whether he went completely alone or if he had an entourage of servants. Sometime, we can fill in the blanks when details are missing from a passage, as long as we do not introduce content which passage does not suggest.

When Abraham left his father, he did not travel alone and when Issac went to the land of the Philistines, he had quite an extensive group of followers. Later, when Esau comes to meet his twin, he has some four hundred warriors with him. Travel in the ancient Middle East was not always safe and people usually travelled in groups for safety's sake.

So, it is likely that Jacob arrived with an entourage and that he was not alone when he joined with Laban's camp. He has already had an encounter with G-d in the form of a prophetic dream, but we are not told what kind of ladder he saw or how high it was when it reached the heavens. He saw angels ascending and descending and understood that G-d was very active in the affairs of mankind.

We are not told in what form YHVH appeared to Jacob in the dream, but it is part of a personal encounter where the Abrahamic covenant is personally bestowed upon him. He took the stone which he was using for a pillow and erected a monument, likely with other stones. He pours out oil on the summit of the monument and swears an oath to the L-RD. It is an "if, then" proposal and gives us the second mention of tithing in the Torah.

With Abraham, the tithe was paid to the L-RD through the priest Melchizedek. We are not told whether another priest of YHVH was residing at Bethel or how Jacob intended to pay his tithe which has always meant 10% of your increase. In any event, a tithe is to be given to YHVH and we learn later that such offerings were usually made for the benefit of the community. This is the same practice we follow today. We are not helping some rich evangelist to finance his private jet or contributing to any number of good causes that are seeking for our help.

Offerings and tithes are given for the upkeep of our community. Over and above this basic contribution, we are free to exercise wisdom and discretion in supporting other ministries. Our tithes belong to our local community and should be made first, before we consider supporting other worthy causes. Many ministries are quite adept at soliciting our support, but I am always cautious when these calls for support are aggressive and when I am told that G-d directly wants me to lend my support, before I am even given a chance to think about it or pray about it.

G-d will never speak to another person about me unless it is some kind of prophetic warning or promise that is immediately confirmed by my four friends (my head, my heart, my Bible and my community).

It is too easy to be scammed by elaborate sales pitches that want to obligate us into giving like other sales people who want to separate us from our money. Let us know if you have questions about any group or individual you are considering supporting.

Jacob is no longer a young man when he arrives at his uncle's camp or village. Our passage says that Laban welcomed Jacob to his house. He may have had a permanent residence while his flocks were kept on the move looking for fresh pastures.

Jacob spends a month before he asks Laban for his younger daughter to become his wife. He serves seven years for this privilege and a wedding takes place. At this time, the celebrations lasted one week and a special tent was set up so that the couple could go in and enjoy each other in the midst of all the feasting and celebrating.

When Jacob wakes up in the morning, he discovers that he has been having relations with Leah, Rachel's older sister. The lighting in the tent was likely so dim that he did not see who it was who came into his tent. Two things happen after he makes the discovery about Laban's deception. He is told that he can work another seven years for Rachel, but has to finish the week with Leah first. When he agrees, is also given Rachel and would have spent another week in the bridal tent with the younger sister.

Over the next seven years and probably into the twenty years that Jacob served Laban, a kind of competition occurs between the sisters. They each give Jacob their female servants and with these four wives, Jacob conceives twelve sons and at least one daughter. Later Laban refers to his grandchildren as his sons and daughters, but the names of Jacob's other daughters are not given.

Each of his sons is given a name where one wife is taunting the other and you have to be very careful about attaching prophetic meanings to their names. They will eventually turn into twelve tribes plus one (Levi), but their first years are spent watching their father grow incredibly rich as he cares for Laban's flocks. We learn later that he also has to fight off marauders and even wild beasts which attacked his flocks.

He hears Laban's sons claiming that he has stolen their father's sheep and before they are able to follow up and use violence against Jacob and his family, Jacob is warned by YHVH to head back to Canaan. He has about a seven day head start on Laban, but Laban did not bring his flocks with him and he caught up with Jacob just before he entered the Promised Land. Laban's major complaint is that Jacob has stolen his family gods, which were likely little figurines which he believed protected him and blessed him.

Laban is warned by YHVH not to harm Jacob and really just wants his gods back. Rachel has hidden them under a camel's saddle and does not rise up so that her father can also search her hiding place. At this point, she has not yet become a monotheist (believer in one G-d) and wanted to cover all of her bases as she and the extended family faced the dangers of a long journey and the uncertainties of getting settled in a new land.

At this point, Jacob has quite a considerable camp and many thieves would have been tempted to rob him and even destroy the camp and take all of its wealth. After Jacob has dealt with Laban, he encounters a group of angels and called the place he was camping Mahanaim, which means the place where two camps met.

Sermon: First Winter Series: Ephesians 3:14-21, Exploring the Depths of G-d

Unfortunately, much has been made about the supposed different portrayals of G-d in the New Testament, versus that in the Old Testament. This is simply not true because everything which the New Testament says about G-d is either contained or reflected in the Old Testament. The New Testament is in fact a commentary on the nature and the identity of the Messiah and everything it says about the Messiah is deeply rooted in the teachings of the Old Testament.

Paul came to faith in Messiah later in life, because he vigorously held on to the non biblical teachings of the rabbis. Everything pointed to it being the right time for Messiah to come and Yeshua was born into the right family and was born in the right place. His ministry was indeed an ongoing fulfillment of prophecy, as was His death, resurrection and ascension.

Too often, people impose their own understandings on the Scriptures, instead of letting the Word say what it in fact does say. The charge that elements of our faith in Messiah contain non biblical elements is indeed false, as is any belief in the Messiah that does not point to Yeshua of Nazareth. He is the only true King Israel will ever know. How good are you at letting the Word of G-d be the foundation of all you believe and all that you practice?

Our passage begins with Paul saying that he bent his knee to the Father. Over the centuries, most traditional Jews have stopped the practice of kneeling, even though it has solid biblical support. It is both an act of submission and an act of worship as we learn to acknowledge YHVH for who He is and for what He is like. He is the one for whom both the heavens and the earth take their name. This is actually a way of expressing YHVH's absolute lordship over all creation.

Paul encourages us not to remain in the spiritual shallow end, but to plunge into the incredible wonder and richness of His grace, as we let His Spirit powerfully strengthen our inner man. It is too easy to become spiritually distracted as we wander through this life and too many who call themselves believers, give their lives to things which are not really worthy of our spiritual attention. What things are you paying attention to in your life?

It is not wrong to pursue a career in politics, or in medicine or even law enforcement, as long as we see our careers as a means to express our faith and keep on giving our best to YHVH. He is more than worthy of our primary attention and we should serve Him vigorously as we wander as pilgrims through this life.

When our people wandered through the wilderness, the presence of G-d remained the centre around which their lives and the camp revolved. While the temples stood, they were a focal point of our people's spiritual attention. Today, instead of dwelling in a building, Messiah wants to dwell in our hearts and lives through faith. I am not waiting for a third temple to be built, so that the fullness of the Father can once again dwell in our midst. I want the fullness of G-d to dwell in my heart as I spend my life being a worthy spiritual temple of faith.

I want this dwelling to be rooted and founded in love, both because of all YHVH has done for me and because of all that Messiah accomplished on the cross and all that He will accomplish when He ushers in the everlasting kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind. If our life focus does not centre on the wonder of YHVH, we are not seeing things as we should.

Paul goes on to describe the wonderful love of our Redeemer with four dimensional indicators. He begins with its width, because there is no one and nothing that it cannot touch, as it spreads out over all creation. Just so we begin to get it, Paul goes on to mention its length, which is endless and really beyond our ability to measure.

He goes on to describe Messiah's love as endlessly deep and endlessly high. This is the level and kind of spirituality we are called to experience, no matter what else is going on in our lives. It is said of some people that they have hidden and mysterious depths. As believers, we would take this statement even further and say that there are incredible depths in our Messiah which we should be energetically exploring.

This is not a call to some kind of mysterious mysticism where the hidden or secret things of G-d are revealed. The secret things of G-d will never be revealed, but this does not include the incredible depths of His love. I once met a lady who kept having such supposedly amazing revelations from G-d and told me that the Spirit revealed to her that the resurrected Messiah smelled like roses. It was such a silly claim to make, that I think she needed to wake up and really smell the real roses.

Other mystics, both Jewish and Gentile claim to have unearthed things about G-d which His Word neither reveals or even indicates. In Judaism there are groups of Kabbalists to whom some supposedly amazing hidden things have been revealed. Kabbalah is a Hebrew word which means to receive and there is a popular song about our need to reach out and receive the Sabbath as if it were a bride.

Believers are the bride, not the Sabbath and we receive the Sabbath, every time we observe it. They go on to say that the shechinah (glory) of G-d is broken into seven shards and that one of them is hiding in the Western Wall. To remedy the situation four specially selected Jewish people died and recently went into the spirit realm and when they have gathered enough power, they will re-emerge from this realm and put the shechinah back together as they inaugurate the everlasting Messianic kingdom.

We do not serve some kind of spiritual equivalent of Humpty Dumpty who needs help to be put back together again. Our G-d is unbreakable and there is no such thing as a spiritual realm for special people to enter. Messiah does not need anyone's help to establish His everlasting kingdom and no part of G-d is hiding in the western wall. G-d is everywhere and His special shechinah presence resides in Heaven and will one day be revealed when Messiah returns.

In the mean time, we are called to let Messiah dwell in our hearts through faith, as we plunge into the depth of G-d's love in our Messiah and experience the richness of His glory. This does not mean to come up with weird and extravagant hidden revelations from G-d, but to see His hand, both in the world around us and in our own hearts and lives.

Paul lived through some very amazing experiences, but none of the things which happened to him could compare with the wonder of the love of Messiah which always sustained him. In fact, he even says that the meagre tribulations he has encountered, are not worthy to be compared to the measureless weight of glory which is waiting for him. Are you aware that this same enormous measureless weight of glory is waiting for each of us, if we only had eyes to see it. King David was often in great danger and spent a long time as a fugitive pursued by King Saul. Yet his Psalms are some of the most peaceful Scriptures in the Bible. They also refer to a deep

relationship with G-d and a great longing to spend time in G-d's presence. Some of us may go through periods where we are in danger or are under great stress. It is never a matter of considering the things which we are going through as measures of how close we are able to draw to YHVH or how deeply we can experience His love and grace.

As we deepen our faith and see the hand of G-d active in our lives, we come to realize the wonder of His love and His protection and provision for those who wholeheartedly seek Him. This is not so much a matter of how much time you spend on activities of a religious nature, as it is how thoroughly you welcome the Messiah into every part of your life as you wander as a pilgrim through this life.

In fact, Paul ends this portion by mentioning that the love of Messiah surpasses all knowledge and as we grow in our involvement with His great love, we can be filled with all the fullness of YHVH. This does not mean we will be dwelling behind the veil and have our faces shine because of this great presence. It is also not some kind of strange mystical experience where we leap tall buildings and frequently spend time walking on water.

It is the peaceful confidence that we develop as we come to see the hand of G-d working both in our hearts and in our lives. We may still go through intense trials and great tribulations, but both our final destination and Messiah's daily presence in our lives becomes the single greatest reality we experience on our journey through this life.

It is also not a place we arrive at, like a static location. It is a state of constant renewal where our spiritual digestion gives us both a view of life and an experience of life which is beyond the ability of anyone to experience, except as a believer in the Messiah. Good things can happen to good people across the globe and even bad things can happen to good people and even in the Messiah we are not promised perpetual victory in every experience of our lives.

But being fully aware of our final destination and of His hand in both our lives and in our hearts, gives us a powerful spiritual experience like none other. We may not end up rolling around on the floor or foaming at the mouth, even as we scream at the top of our lungs. It can both be quiet and also quite boisterous, or it can be both.

It can be a constant which we experience in everything and at every stage of our lives. In another place Paul says that G-d makes all things work to our benefit, even as we experience great sorrow and severe persecution. It does not make us somehow become bullet proof where we live unaffected by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. It does make us look for His hand and His provision in all that we encounter. Sometimes He leads us beside quiet waters and sometimes He just provides a way of escape so that we can endure what we are going through.

If we know who He is and if we give Him control of our hearts and lives, as we plunge into an exploration of His great love, then there is a sweetness which can turn even the bitterest experience into an encounter with our King. We begin to see our troubles and those of this fading world as nothing more than Messianic birth pangs that will only last for a few moments in light of the wonder and power of eternity. This level of spiritual intensity is something we are all called to, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

None of the great heroes of the faith always had it easy and those who claim that believers should always have an amazing time free of pain and other troubles, misunderstand how the

grace of G-d works. It can have a very deep impact in our lives, to the point where what we are going through seems like a walk in the park. One martyr was going to be burned at the stake and he told his followers that if the pain was bearable, he would lift his arm as he was burning. When he did so, there was great panic among the gathered crowds who thought that somehow he was coming back to life.

I am neither much of an optimist or a pessimist, but I definitely always want to be a Bible based, spiritual realist. I wish no pain or trouble on anyone and even when it comes, we need to look for the finger prints of our Messiah. This is because He is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond anything we could think or ask.

This does not mean our lives become one big series of adventures like the action heroes we see in the movies. But seriously, it means that G-d's intervention in our lives is not limited to our ability to understand it or even see it coming. I pray for wisdom and safety for each of you and I want to trust the L-rd to meet all of your needs, both the ones you talk about and the ones which you keep to yourself.

But honestly, I cannot see the future or what may be coming your way. I believe that the kingdom purposes of G-d are unstoppable and that YHVH is working to set everything in motion for His everlasting Kingdom to be established over all the nations and generations of mankind.

But when it comes to how He is going to bring this all about, I just want to trust in Him and walk according to His love as I grow in faith and concentrate my best efforts on plunging into the wonder of His love and the power of His grace. This will always require great patience and perseverance, but it is the only perspective on life which is worth embracing.

Paul knew he was going to suffer incredibly for his faith in the Messiah and he knew that this might mean earning a martyr's crown. He was not afraid and did not focus on the arrival of the morbid eventuality. He knew that the grace of G-d is renewed every day and that the power and provision of G-d would never run out.

You know, there are times when I get impatient and want to see our congregation increase and reach our full potential, sooner, rather than later. I know that we will all face great challenges and I want to be sure to face them with courage and faith. When I started to get sick, about thirty years ago, I did not start to question either the provision or the protection of G-d. I just wanted His purposes to be fulfilled in my life and in how I responded to all the unreliable happenstances of my life.

Paul ends this portion of his epistle by offering G-d all the glory in the body of Messiah and in the Messiah Himself, and this in all the generations and ages of mankind. Spiritual realities should always be the big things in our life and we need to stubbornly see our lives as a pilgrimage to our Father's House in Glory. When what is significant to YHVH through His Word is significant in our lives, we are on the right track and can expect great things from our King. There is no promise that things will get easy, but we are promised that they will contain much glory and help us to plunge into the depths of the Father's love, both when we are dancing on the mountain top and when we are struggling through the valley. Shabbat Shalom.