

their desire was to satisfy their own flesh and never really seek or pursue the God of Creation.

Perhaps you know some people like this in your own family or among your acquaintances. If so, pray that whatever root of bitterness exists between these lost souls and God, **that it would be revealed and removed**. God is merciful and *does answer* the fervent prayers of His redeemed children! While Esau may not have been able to resolve his differences with God, and may be used as an example about how God chooses some rather than others—God nevertheless has given every human a free will, and the right to choose whom we will serve.

May He hear our prayers for the lost, using them to set the captives free! Might I suggest claiming the words of Isaiah, for those who perhaps are still trapped in the cavernous roots of bitterness and despair:

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me **to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners;** to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn *in Zion*, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.” (Isaiah 61:1-3).

Reflection for *V'yeitzei* “Heaven’s Ladder”

John 1:43-51

In this week’s Torah reading, *V'yeitzei* (Genesis 28:10-32:3), the emphasis turns to Jacob. This spiritual forbearer of ours increasingly becomes known for his role in supplanting his brother Esau, as the blessed heir of Isaac. Our selection is preceded by Jacob having to flee for his life, after Esau is overheard making threats to kill Jacob, as our reading from last week, *Toldot* (Genesis 25:19-28:9), winded down:

“So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, ‘The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.’ Now when the words of her elder son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent and called her younger son Jacob, and said to him, ‘Behold your brother Esau is consoling himself concerning you *by planning* to kill you. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise, flee to Haran, to my brother Laban!’” (Genesis 27:41-43).

Even though Jacob had various challenges to face in life—even some challenges of his own doing—it is apparent that He has received great favor from the Holy One. In the opening verses of *V'yeitzei*, we find this road-weary traveler at what will eventually become Bethel, as Jacob received a dream-vision which would propel him for the rest of his life. As you read some of the account of this dream, and what was communicated to Jacob by God, note how many of these promises are basically reiterations of what was previously communicated to Abraham and Isaac in their earlier encounters with Him:

“Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. 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. 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. 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. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will 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. 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.’ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it’” (Genesis 28:10-16).

The unique revelation to Jacob—as compared to his grandfather Abraham and father Isaac—is not in what was said, but how he was able to see angels of God ascending and descending from Earth to Heaven, and back again. What an awesome sight this must have been, as the frightened and lonely Jacob was traveling the well-beaten path from Beersheba to Haran! His confidence in God had to be strengthened, and fears of highway robbers most likely subsided, when he realized that the Creator was on his side. A fear and respect for God became his assurance, rather than a fear of what mortals could do. As a result, Jacob built an altar and consecrated it with oil, before making some vows to the God of his fathers:

“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.’ 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. He called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You’” (Genesis 28:17-22).

There is no doubt that the early followers of Yeshua were well versed in this account from the Torah. One can only imagine how familiar they were with the stories of Jacob, and in particular, that of “Jacob’s ladder” and his interactions with the supernatural. It is possible that the site of Luz, renamed Bethel (or “House of God”),⁷ became a point of interest on the mountain highway from the Galilee area to Jerusalem. For the Disciples, we have good reason to believe that the Torah’s account of Jacob was recounted multiple times a year in their studies, or perhaps they simply thought about it as they made their way throughout Judea and Galilee, and had to be reminded of how he had fled from Esau and later returned. Who Jacob was surely affected the Disciples’ worldview, and how God had interacted with their predecessors in faith.

The scene of Jacob’s ladder, and what it depicts of angels ascending and descending, was incorporated by Yeshua as He introduced Himself to some of His early disciples. Yeshua actually claimed that the angels would be ascending and descending *upon Himself* as the Son of Man, rather than just on some type of ladder. The point is well taken, because it is only *through Him* that unimpeded access to the supernatural realm of God’s Kingdom is provided:

“The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Yeshua said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote—Yeshua of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ Yeshua saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, ‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!’ Nathanael said to Him, ‘How do You know me?’ Yeshua answered and said to him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’ Nathanael answered Him, ‘Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.’ Yeshua answered and said to him, ‘Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.’ **And He said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man’**” (John 1:43-51).

Obviously, this Yeshua from Nazareth developed a strong following, as stated here by people being supernaturally drawn toward Him, as He would not only teach them as a rabbi—but open them up to the realm of His Father. Bruce Milne offers us some excellent observations:

“Jesus’ self-designation, *Son of Man*, occurs frequently in the synoptic gospels. It is a common Hebraism for ‘man’. It also occurs in the very important passage in Daniel 7:13f., in the apocalyptic vision of the heavenly Son of Man, who appears at the end of history on the clouds of heaven to exercise universal judgment and receive the worship of the nations. Jesus’ use of the definite article when using the

⁷ Heb. *Beit’El*.

title of himself, as here, indicates that this is consistently the background to his understanding of it. The claim to such a role in the divine purposes is a staggering one. But this, and similar claims recurring through the gospel [of John], is wholly congruent with Jesus' divine nature."⁸

Above it is recorded how Yeshua just told Philip to "Follow Me" (Grk. *akolouthe moi*), and he joined the entourage. Philip did not want his friend Nathanael to miss out on the opportunity to be with Him, recognizing this Yeshua to be the Messiah of whom the Torah and Prophets had foretold. Upon encountering Him, Nathanael immediately recognized that Yeshua was the Son of God and the King of Israel. Without hesitation, because he believed, Yeshua asserted how He is going to be a bridge between the realms of Heaven and Earth.

As you might compare the revelation that Jacob received with seeing angels ascend and descend upon a ladder, and Yeshua claiming that He will be the One upon whom such angels will ascend and descend—what comes to your mind? Earlier we see how John the Immerser recognized how a future One would come, and the Spirit of God would descend out of Heaven and remain with Him. The image of what we see taking place is extraordinary:

"The next day he [John the Immerser] saw Yeshua coming to him and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He on behalf of whom I said, "After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me." I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.' John testified saying, 'I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. **I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, "He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit."** I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.' Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Yeshua as He walked, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Yeshua. And Yeshua turned and saw them following, and said to them, 'What do you seek?' They said to Him, 'Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?' He said to them, 'Come, and you will see.' So they came and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John *speak* and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which translated means Anointed One). He brought him to Yeshua. Yeshua looked at him and said, 'You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter). The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Yeshua said to him, 'Follow Me'" (John 1:29-43).

⁸ Bruce Milne, *The Message of John* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 61.

The declaration that John the Immerser made that Yeshua was the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, was incredible. Instead of just seeing a host of angels moving up and down on some kind of ladder, John described how the Spirit descended from Heaven and remained upon Yeshua. John understood that this meant Yeshua was going to be empowered to immerse His followers in the Holy Spirit. *He quickly concluded that Yeshua is the Son of God.* The next day John relinquished two of his disciples so that they could become followers of Yeshua. One of those first disciples was Andrew, whose brother was Simon Peter. Andrew declared without equivocation that Yeshua was the Messiah. Simon was also called Cephas (Ara. *Keifa*) or Peter (Grk. *Petros*), meaning “rock,” and before long Philip was engaged with the simple request, “Follow Me.”

The introduction of Yeshua to some of His earliest followers was quite an extraordinary cascade of revelatory events. The fact that John the Immerser, Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, and then Nathanael—all rapidly understood that they had found or had been introduced to the Messiah of Israel—is incredible to comprehend! Even if any of these individuals had encountered Yeshua before, *they recognized* that He was no mere mortal like themselves.

How about you? Have you had an experience like Jacob, where you have envisioned the angelic host ascending and descending from Heaven? Or more importantly, have you come to know the Messiah Yeshua, and have recognized that through trust in His work for you at Golgotha (Calvary)—by faith in Him you have the key to accessing the power of Heaven?

Yeshua is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). *Do you believe this?* If you do not, you need to seek after the One who is life everlasting. According to the Scriptures, He is the ladder into Heaven!

Reflection for *V'yishlach* “So-Called Brethren”

1 Corinthians 5:1-13
2 Corinthians 6:14-18
Hebrews 12:14-17
Revelation 7:1-12

This week we are examining *V'yishlach* (Genesis 32:4-36:43), and at this point in our Torah readings we arrive at Jacob’s return to Canaan from laboring in Padan