

Genesis 24:7, 40

“The Angel of the Lord Will Watch Abraham’s Servant”

“The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and who swore to me, saying, ‘To your descendants I will give this land,’ He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there... He said to me, ‘The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send His angel with you to make your journey successful, and you will take a wife for my son from my relatives and from my father’s house.’”

The Patriarch Abraham knew that his son Isaac could not marry one of the local Canaanite women, and so he commissioned his most trusted servant, most probably Eliezer of Damascus (Genesis 15:2), to return to Mesopotamia, to find a suitable wife for him (Genesis 24:1-14). As Abraham is instructing his servant, he reminds him how God had said, “I will assign this land to your offspring” (Genesis 24:7b, NJPS), a sure statement about how finding a wife for Isaac bears a significance beyond just two people being married. Abraham informs his servant, presumably as an assurance that he will be protected on his journey, *yishlach malakho l’phaneikha* (לְפָנָיו מַלְאָכּוֹ לְפָנֶיךָ), “He shall send His messenger before you” (Genesis 24:7c, Alter).

The bulk of Genesis 24 records the scene of Abraham’s servant encountering Rebekah, who will become Isaac’s wife (Genesis 24:15-67). When he encounters Rebekah, informing her of the charge he has been given, among the things he says is, “The LORD, in whose presence I have walked, shall send His messenger with you” (Genesis 24:40a, Alter), *l’panayv yishlach malakho ittakh* (לְפָנָיו יִשְׁלַח מַלְאָכּוֹ אִתְּךָ).

Read isolated by itself, the messenger or angel noted in Genesis 24:7, 40, does not have to be the figure of the *malakh* YHWH or “messenger/angel of the LORD,” who is witnessed speaking in the first person as the LORD or YHWH. However, when a selection of passages are considered, it is fair to conclude that the messenger or angel spoken of by Abraham and his servant, is this figure, who is ensuring that Abraham indeed would have progeny, with his son Isaac finding a wife.

Genesis 31:10-13

“The Angel of the Lord Speaks to Jacob”

“And it came about at the time when the flock were mating that I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the male goats which were mating *were* striped, speckled, and mottled. Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob,’ and I said, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘Lift up now your eyes and see *that* all the male goats which are mating are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.’”

When the Patriarch Jacob amasses a great amount of wealth, becoming a threat to his father-in-law Laban, he is directed by the Lord to leave Paddan-aram, and return to Canaan (Genesis 31:1-21). The record includes the statement, “Then the LORD said to Jacob [*v’yomer* YHWH *el-Ya’akov*, וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-יַעֲקֹב], ‘Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you’” (Genesis 31:3). As Jacob and his two wives look on his flock, as they prepare to return (Genesis 31:4), he reviews the tense situation which has arisen with Laban (Genesis 31:5-6), Laban’s unethical business practices (Genesis 31:7), and their agreement on which of the flock would be Jacob’s, based on their appearance (Genesis 31:8). Jacob indicates how “Thus God has taken away your father’s livestock and given *them* to me” (Genesis 31:9).

Approaching the Nature of Yeshua from the Tanach

Jacob recounts how when the flock was mating, he received a dream, apparently to assure him of the future, as he is a descendant of Abraham and carrier of the Abrahamic promise. Jacob received a dream, in which a supernatural figure appears, stating, *v'yomer eilai malakh haElohim b'chalom, Ya'akov* (וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי בְּחִלּוֹם יַעֲקֹב), “And God’s messenger said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob!’” (Genesis 31:11a, Alter), to which Jacob responded with “Here I am” (Genesis 31:11b). This supernatural figure is labeled in the text as *malakh haElohim* (מַלְאֲכֵי הָאֱלֹהִים), a “messenger/angel of God.” Further on, this being is witnessed speaking the first person, recognizing what has become of Jacob: “for I have noted all that Laban has been doing to you” (Genesis 31:12b, NJPS).

This figure goes much further, though, stating in the first person, “I am the God of Beth-el” (Genesis 31:13a, ATS): *anokhi haEl Beit-El asher mashachata sham matzeivah asher nadarta li sham neder* (אֲנֹכִי הָאֵל בֵּית־אֵל אֲשֶׁר מָשַׁחְתָּ שָׁם מִצְבֵּה אֲשֶׁר נָדַרְתָּ לִּי שָׁם נֶדֶר), “I the-God Beth El where you-anointed there pillar where you-vowed to-me there vow” (Genesis 31:13, Kohlenberger).²⁷ Jacob, having been told by the LORD or YHWH to return to Canaan (Genesis 31:3), is in Genesis 31:13b told to return to Canaan, by an entity first stated to be a *malakh haElohim* or a “messenger/angel of God,” but then which speaks in the first person with “I am the God of Bethel.” Assuming that this figure is the same *malakh YHWH* or “messenger/angel of the LORD,” which has been encountered previously in Patriarchal narratives, then significant questions are posed, for future Christological passages in the Apostolic Writings, about what it means when an entity apparently representing the LORD or YHWH, can then speak in the first person “I” as He.

In this scene of Jacob preparing to return to Canaan, one is prompted to consider the previous encounter he had in Genesis 28:10-19, in his dream of angels or messengers ascending and descending on the ladder into Heaven, where the LORD or YHWH does appear:

“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 [*v'hinnei malakhei Elohim 'olim v'yordim bo*, וְהִנֵּה מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בוּ]. **And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, ‘I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac** [*v'hinnei YHWH nitzav 'alayv v'yomer, ani YHWH Elohei Avraham avikha v'Elohei Yitzchak*, וְהִנֵּה יְהוָה נֹצֵב עָלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ וְאֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק]; 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.’ 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” (Genesis 28:10-19).

What is important to note about the Genesis 31:11 *malakh haElohim* or “messenger/angel of God,” which states in Genesis 31:13 *anokhi haEl Beit-El*—is that when reviewing the scene at Bethel, the only figure or entity which qualifies as having been revealed to the Patriarch Jacob, is the LORD or YHWH. In his dreaming, Jacob is recorded as seeing “a ramp...set against the ground with its top reaching the heavens, and, look messengers of God were going up and coming down

²⁷ Kohlenberger, 1:82-83.

it" (Genesis 28:12, Alter). The entities which go up and down the *sullam* (סֻלָּם), the "ladder" or "stairway" (NIV), are *malakhei Elohim* or "messengers/angels of God." Following this, it is recorded that Jacob actually encounters the LORD or YHWH: "And here: YHWH was standing over against him. He said: I am YHWH, the God of Avraham your father and the God of Yitzhak" (Genesis 28:13, Fox). Jacob is assured that his descendants will greatly multiply (Genesis 28:14-15). This is the same entity which is to be associated with Jacob's later encounter with a *malakh haElohim* speaking *anokhi haEl Beit-El*.

There is no ambiguity in Genesis 28:10-19 about the identity of the figure speaking *ani YHWH* (Genesis 28:13), as this entity is not associated with the other beings, which are designated as *malakhei Elohim* or "messengers/angels of God." The LORD or YHWH spoke to Jacob at Bethel. At Paddan-aram, as Jacob recalls what he had witnessed, it is a messenger/angel of God, which identifies as the God of Bethel. Is this messenger/angel to be associated as only a supernatural intermediary for the God of Heaven? Recognizing the assurances given by this entity to Jacob (Genesis 28:14-15; 31:13), would we really expect this from a created being—which has actually spoken in the first person with, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac" (Genesis 28:13), when a third person recognition of this God could have instead been easily issued?

That the entity who self-identifies with *haEl Beit-El* (Genesis 31:13) and *ani YHWH* (Genesis 28:13), but is also stated to be *malakh haElohim* (Genesis 31:11)—has to ultimately be un-created—most certainly plays into future statements made by Yeshua the Messiah. He would tell Nathanael in John 1:51, "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," invoking Jacob's dream of the ladder into Heaven. Yeshua, as the Son of Man—an entity in Daniel 7:9-14 given all of the honors and worship of God (discussed further)—is to be properly associated as the Being which spoke to Jacob of the promise made to Abraham (Genesis 28:14-15).

Genesis 32:24-30

"Jacob Wrestles With a Divine Figure"

"Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. 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. Then he said, 'Let me go, for the dawn is breaking.' But he said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' So he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' He said, 'Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.' Then Jacob asked him and said, 'Please tell me your name.' But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name?' And he blessed him there. So Jacob named the place Peniel, for *he said*, 'I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.'"

As the Patriarch Jacob was on his journey back to Canaan (Genesis 32:1-23), he harbors a great deal of fear toward his twin brother Esau, as Esau did not receive Isaac's blessing, and he may be harmed by him (cf. Genesis 33). In the course of his travels, Jacob is left alone for a period of time, and wrestles with a man all during the night, after which he receives a permanent limp (Genesis 32:31-32). Many Bible readers, when considering Jacob's nightlong wrestling encounter, will, by default, conclude that he wrestled with an angel. However, there are significant reasons for us to consider that the entity with whom Jacob wrestled was, in fact, more than just a supernatural intermediary (cf. Genesis 32:1-2).

It is first stated, "Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn" (Genesis 32:24, NJPS), *v'yei'aveiq ish immo ad 'alot ha'shachar* (וַיֵּאָבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלֹת הַשָּׁחַר). This being is stated to be an *ish* (אִישׁ), a man or a male, and notably here not designated with *adam*