

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* (וַיִּיאָבֵק 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*

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(אָדָם), which could more generally mean human. This being is more powerful than Jacob, and all he had to do was touch Jacob's thigh, so that it was relocated (Genesis 32:25). In spite of receiving this injury, Jacob insists that he will not let go until he receives a blessing (Genesis 32:26). This figure asks Jacob what his name is, to which he would respond *Ya'akov* (יַעֲקֹב; Genesis 32:27). The Patriarch would be renamed Israel or *Yisrael* (יִשְׂרָאֵל), a testimony to his having striven (Genesis 32:28a), a vocation which would be passed on to his descendants and the community which would service God's purposes and interests in the world.²⁸

The specified reason given to Jacob, as to why his name would be changed to Israel, is *ki-sarita im-Elohim v'im-anashim v'tukal* (כִּי־שָׁרִיתָ עִם־אֱלֹהִים וְעִם־אָנָשִׁים וַתִּגְבַּל) "for you-struggled with God and-with men and-you-overcame" (Genesis 32:28b, Kohlenberger).²⁹ While Christian versions will render *im-Elohim* as "with God," the inclusive language NRSV having, "for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed," Jewish versions of Genesis 32:28[29] are indications of some difficulties. Various Jewish versions have rendered the clause *im-Elohim v'im-anashim* as "with beings divine and human" (Genesis 32:28[29], NJPS), "with the Divine and with man" (ATS), and "with [an angel of] GOD and with men" (Keter Crown Bible), obviously trying to circumvent any direct reference to God proper. Of course, it is to be fairly recognized how the Hebrew *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים) does have some flexibility in usage, and can in some instances mean "divine ones, superhuman beings including God and angels" (BDB).³⁰ But whether *im-Elohim* can be translated as anything other than "with God" in Genesis 32:28[29], can be challenged. In his specialty translation of the Torah, Robert Alter has "with God and men"³¹ for *im-Elohim v'im-anashim*, indicating in a footnote,

"The Hebrew term *'elohim* is a high concentration point of lexical ambiguity that serves the enigmatic character of the story very well. It is *not* that the term that means 'divine messenger' but it can refer to divine beings...It can also mean simply 'God,' and in some contexts—could this be one?—it means 'gods.' In a few cases, it also designates something like 'princes' or 'judges,' but that is precluded here by its being antithetically paired with 'men.' It is not clear whether the anonymous adversary is referring to himself when he says *'elohim* or to more-than-human agents encountered by Jacob throughout his career."³²

While Alter may be theologically bent toward concluding that the entity with whom Jacob wrestled was a supernatural agent sent from God, as far as translation of *im-Elohim v'im-anashim* goes, because Divine is contrasted with mortal, "with God and with men/humans," is the most appropriate to provide for an English reader.

Jacob himself inquires of this being what his name is, and is only told, "Why is it that you ask my name?" (Genesis 32:29). The intention of this was for Jacob to surely reflect upon his encounter, and to draw his own conclusion as to what had just transpired with his wrestling match during the night. *Who did Jacob wrestle with?* It is recorded, "And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, meaning, 'I have seen God face to face and I came out alive'" (Genesis 32:30, Alter), *ki-ra'iti Elohim panim el-panim v'tinatzeil nafshi* (כִּי־רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים וַתִּנְצֵל נַפְשִׁי) (Genesis 32:30, Alter). While the text communicates "for I-saw God face to face" (Kohlenberger),³³ *ki-ra'iti Elohim panim el-panim* is not often rendered along these lines in Jewish versions: "I have seen a divine being face to face" (Genesis 32:30[31], NJPS), "For I have seen the Divine face to face" (ATS), "For I saw

²⁸ For some further reflections, consult the relevant sections of the author's book *Israel in Future Prophecy*, as well as the entry for Genesis 32:24-32 in the *Messianic Kosher Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

²⁹ Kohlenberger, 1:90.

³⁰ BDB, 43.

³¹ Also Fox: "with God and men."

³² Robert Alter, trans., *The Five Books of Moses* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2004), 181.

³³ Kohlenberger, 1:90.

GOD[’s angel] face to face” (Keter Crown Bible). Later in the Torah, readers see that Moses is said to have spoken with God “face to face,” *panim el-panim* (פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים; Exodus 33:11), and it is seldom doubted or challenged that this was actually God Himself. In his commentary on Genesis, John E. Hartley concludes,

“Face to face’ indicates that he had been in direct contact with God, not that he had looked on God’s face. Jacob thereby acknowledged that his opponent was more than one of the heavenly messengers. In light of other divine-human encounters reported in the book of Genesis, this man most likely was ‘the angel of Yahweh’ (16:7).”³⁴

A further recollection of the Genesis 31:24-30 encounter with Jacob wrestling during the night, would be declared by the Prophet Hosea:

“The LORD also has a dispute with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; He will repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he took his brother by the heel, **and in his maturity he contended with God. Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed** [*u’be’ono sarah et-Elohim v’yasar el-malakh v’yukal, וַיִּבְּאֵנוּ שָׂרָה אֶת-אֱלֹהִים וַיִּשְׂר אֶל-מַלְאָךְ וַיִּכְל, וַיִּבְּאֵנוּ שָׂרָה אֶת-אֱלֹהִים וַיִּשְׂר אֶל-מַלְאָךְ וַיִּכְל*]; he wept and sought His favor. He found Him at Bethel and there He spoke with us” (Hosea 12:2-4).

The text of Hosea 12:3-4 identifies *Elohim* as the messenger/angel, with whom Jacob wrestled: “and-in-manhood-of-him he-struggled with God and-he-struggled with angel and-he-overcame” (Kohlenberger).³⁵ Jewish versions are seen providing a less-than-faithful rendering of *sarah et-Elohim v’yasar el-malakh*, as ATS has, “he struggled with [an angel of] God; he struggled with an angel,” the Keter Crown Bible also having, “he overcame [an angel of] GOD. He struggled with an angel” — with some interpretive insertions obviously interjected into English translation. Various Jewish examiners are aware of the implications of the *malakh* or messenger/angel being identified as *Elohim*, especially if this is to be taken as more than just possessing a supernatural nature. If God proper can legitimately appear as a messenger/angel, interacting with figures such as the Patriarch Jacob, then it provides those who believe in Yeshua of Nazareth, with a principled basis for Him being God born in human flesh. And indeed, recognizing the place of Hosea 12:3-4, Walter C. Kaiser in *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, draws the conclusion that the figure with whom Jacob wrestled was a pre-Incarnate Yeshua:

“Hosea 12:4 describes the antagonist...as an ‘angel.’ But since Old Testament appearances of God, or theophanies, are routinely described as involving the ‘angel of the Lord,’ it should not surprise us that the Lord of glory took the guise or form of an angel. In fact, that is exactly what God would do later on in his enfleshment, or incarnation. He would take on flesh; in his coming as a babe to Bethlehem, however, he took on human flesh forever.

“But what really clinches the argument for this identification is the fact that in verse 3 of Hosea 12, the parallel clause equates this ‘angel’ with God himself. Jacob struggled with an ‘angel,’ yes, but he also ‘struggled with God.’....

“It thus appears that the ‘man’ or ‘angel’ with whom Jacob wrestled was Jesus himself, in a temporary incarnate form prior to his permanent enfleshment when he would come to earth as a human being. This is consistent with other places in the Old Testament where the ‘angel of the Lord’ can be identified as the [Son]...”³⁶

³⁴ John E. Hartley, *New International Bible Commentary: Genesis* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 285.

³⁵ Kohlenberger, 4:497.

³⁶ Walter C. Kaiser, Peter H. Davids, F.F. Bruce, and Manfred T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), pp 132, 133.