

## More on Jacob's Name Change

**Genesis 35:10** - "And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel."

This second naming of Jacob as Israel at Bethel may have been meant as the *only* one.

Some Rabbis assert that the Angel who wrestled with Jacob at the brook Jabbok was only charged with telling him that his name would be changed to Israel *when he returned to Bethel*, as he had vowed. Instead, Jacob - perhaps pushed into the moment by the pain of his dislocated thigh - forces the name-change immediately. "And he blessed him *there*." (i.e. Instead of at Bethel).

But this was sort of like using a credit card. Or spending the money before the check clears the bank. His failure for decades to fulfill his vow to return to Bethel compounded the problem and left an imbalance - a debt - that caused an imbalance within his own family, expressed in the rape of Dinah, the massacre by Simeon and Levi, the incest of Reuben, etc. But each crisis pushed him closer to realizing his identity as "Israel" more fully.

### Israel = Wonderful = Messiah

Rabbi Eliezer was a member of the Sanhedrin along with Gamaliel. His student was Rabbi Akiba.

Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer (first century A.D.) on **Genesis 32:28** -

"And (the angel) called his name Israel, like his own name, *for his own name was called Israel.*"

(See Gen. Rab. lxxviii. 3, and Tosaphoth on T.B. Synhedrin, 37b, catchword "From the corner"; cf. Num. Rab. x. 6. )

The Angel says he's been sent to "deliver him and save him from the hand of Esau." But it is really only the internal struggle between "Jacob" and "Israel" that will achieve that. He needs to be saved from being Jacob. The Angel's role is to cause that to happen.

Jacob has always been "behind" - second born but grabbing he heel, plotting and scheming beforehand, sending messengers to Esau in an orchestrated production. a sense of control. But what is lacking is spontaneity and in-the-moment zeal. Wrestling with the Angel is the first appearance of Joseph acting with immediacy, thus allowing Israel to begin merging with his identity, pushing out Jacob.

The idea of this Haggadah seems to be: the angel is named according to the mission entrusted to him by God. Here it was to announce the ideal for Jacob to pursue, namely, that he was to live as "Israel," the warrior of God, destined in his seed to do battle with

everything which opposes the establishment on earth of the Kingdom of God. Therefore the angel is named Israel. Israel must fear neither man nor angel ; he has prevailed over the powers above man, and need fear only God.

See **Judges 13:3** ff. for the case of the angel and Manoah, where the same principle obtains. The angel's name in Hebrew suggests the core of the word "the separation" involved in the Nazirite vow of Samson.

It may also be that the angel was the guardian angel of Israel and therefore bore the name "Israel"

At the Angel's appearance to Samson's parents Manoah and his wife, the Hebrew word translated as "wonderful" in **Judges 13:17-19** is Pil'iy. The word not only means wonderful but also implies something that is extraordinary and incomprehensible. The only other time this word is used in the Old Testament is in Psalm 139:6 where the knowledge of the LORD is described by David as being far beyond his ability to attain. The Angel of the LORD's name is not only a wonderful but is beyond the ability for man to fully grasp.

**Judges 13:22** - And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God."

**Isaiah 9:6** - "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

"Wonderful" in Isaiah 6:9 and the "wonderful" in Judges 13:22 are both from the root "pala" (wondrous, marvelous)

**Exodus 4:22** - "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, "Israel is My son, My firstborn."