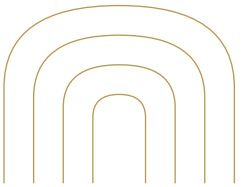
HEKHAL · READER'S EDITION



בראשית לב

Jacob at Peniel

Genesis 32 · Yaakov at Peni'el

King James Version (1611)

PUBLIC-DOMAIN TRANSLATION

Edition of 2026-08-13 · hekhal.org

About this edition

King James Version of 1611, public domain. The KJV preserves the early modern English idiom in which the passage entered the Anglophone Christian imagination. The Hebrew text follows the Masoretic textus receptus. Hekhal hosts the passage here as a flagship of the Christian Esoteric Exegesis corpus, which reads it through the patristic and medieval typological tradition; the same passage is read on its own terms in the Jewish tradition (cross-link to the Kabbalah codex and to the planned Hebrew Bible primary text edition).

TRADITION	christian-mysticism
LANGUAGE	Hebrew
PERIOD	compiled c. 6th c. BCE; final form Persian period
ATTRIBUTION	Composite (P/J/E source critical analysis); received as Mosaic in both Jewish and Christian canons
TRANSLATION	King James Version (1611)
LICENCE	Public domain
ONLINE	https://hekhal.org/texts/peniel/

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The wrestling at the ford of the Jabbok is among the strangest and most concentrated passages in the Hebrew Bible. In nine verses Jacob is left alone, met by an unnamed being, wrestled through the night, wounded, blessed, renamed, and refused an answer to his question about the wrestler's name. He emerges limping into a sunrise he names *Peniel*, "the face of God."

The passage is the editorial spine of the Christian Corpus on Hekhal. The Christian patristic and medieval traditions read the wrestling typologically: the night encounter as figure of the Christian's struggle in prayer, the wound as figure of the cost of grace, the new name *Israel* as figure of baptismal renaming, the withheld name as figure of the apophatic limit. The accumulated reading runs from Origen and Ambrose through Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, and the Rhineland mystics into the Spanish *noche oscura*.

Hekhal preserves the Hebrew opposite the King James English so that the reader can track the original at the level the text itself works on: the play of *panim* (face), *peni-El* (face of God), *Yisra-El* (one who struggles with God), and the asked-and-refused name. The editorial reading follows the bilingual text. The Jewish reading of the same passage is honored in its own register and cross-referenced rather than annexed.

CROSS-REFERENCES

- Penuel (פְּנִיאֵל), the place name Jacob gives the ford.
- Typos (τύπος), the figural mode in which the passage is read.
- Quadriga, the four senses applied to this passage in turn.

- Apophasis (ἀπόφασις), the negative-theological frame for the withheld name.

Jacob at Peniel

GENESIS 32:22–32 · HEBREW · HEBREW BIBLE · RECEIVED TEXT

CANONICAL

GENESIS 32:22–24 · THE CROSSING AND THE MAN

22 And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok.

23 And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had.

24 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

בראשית לב · כג-כה

וַיָּקָם בַּלַּיְלָה הוּא וַיִּקַּח אֶת־
תֵּי נָשָׁיו וְאֶת־שְׁתֵּי שִׁפְחֹתָיו
אֶת־אַחַד עָשָׂר יְלָדָיו וַיַּעֲבֹר אֵת
עֲבַר יַבֹּק:

וַיִּקָּחֵם וַיַּעֲבִרֵם אֶת־הַנָּחַל
עֲבֵר אֶת־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ:

וַיִּוָּתֵר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ וַיֵּאָבֵק אִישׁ
מּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר:

2

בראשית לב · כו-כז

וַיַּ֣רְא כִּי֩ לֹ֨א יָכֹ֤ל לוֹ֙ וַיִּגַּ֣ע בְּכַף־
כֹּ֔ו וַתֵּקַ֖ע כַּף־יֶ֣רֶךְ יַעֲקֹ֑ב
הֵאָבְקֹ֖ו עִמֹּֽו׃

וַיֹּ֗אמֶר שַׁלְּחֵ֙נִי֙ כִּ֣י עָלָ֣ה הַשָּׁ֔חַר
אֹמֶר֙ לֹ֣א אֲשַׁלֵּ֔חַךְ כִּ֖י אִם־
רַכְתָּֽנִי׃

4

GENESIS 32:25–26 · THE WOUND AND THE DAWN

25 And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.

26 And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

3

בראשית לב · כח-ל

וַיֹּ֥אמֶר אֵלָ֖יו מַה־שְּׁמֶ֑ךָ וַיֹּ֖אמֶר
יַעֲקֹֽב׃

GENESIS 32:27–29 · THE RENAMING

27 And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.

28 And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for

as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

29 And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.

5

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמֵר עוֹד
וּמְךָ כִּי אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־שָׂרִיתָ
ם־אֱלֹהִים וְעִם־אֲנָשִׁים וַתּוּכָל׃

וַיִּשְׁאַל יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּידָה־נָּא
וּמְךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶּה תִּשְׁאַל לִשְׁמִי
בָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ שָׁם׃

6

GENESIS 32:30–32 · PENIEL AND THE LIMP

בראשית לב · לא-לג

30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

31 And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.

32 Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank,

וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם
נִיאֵל כִּי־רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פָּנִים
ל־פָּנִים וַתִּנָּצֵל נַפְשִׁי׃

וַתִּזְרַח־לוֹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר עָבַר
ת־פְּנוּאֵל וְהוּא צֹלֵעַ עַל־יְרֵכוֹ׃

which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.

7

עַל־כֵּן לֹא־יֹאכְלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
ת־גִּיד הַנָּשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר עַל־כַּף הַיָּרֵךְ
ד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי נָגַע בְּכַף־יֶרֶךְ
נָקָב בְּגִיד הַנָּשֶׁה׃

8

A reading

God will sometimes come to you in the dark, through struggle. Not to destroy you, not to explain himself, but to see whether you will hold on.

The passage opens at night, at a ford. Jacob has just sent everything he owns ahead of him. His wives, his womenservants, his eleven children, his herds, the goods he has accumulated through twenty years of laboring for Laban. He sends them across the brook and stays alone on the far side. The text gives no reason. No prayer is recorded. No fear is named. The next sentence begins: *and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.*

The Hebrew verb *vaye'avek* (וַיֵּאָבֵק), translated "wrestled," is a hapax legomenon in this exact form. It plays on Jacob's name (יַעֲקֹב, *Yaakov*) and on the name of the river (יַבֹּק, *Yabbok*). The three words share the consonants *y-b-q* and *y-q-b*; the wordplay is one of the densest in the Pentateuch. Jacob, at the ford of the Yabbok, is gripped (*ne'evak*) by a man whose name he is not given. The text is performing what the encounter performs: holding three things in tension that resolve only under the pressure of the night.

The literal sense (*littera*)

Jacob has just received word that his brother Esau is approaching with four hundred men. The brother he wronged twenty years earlier, the brother whose birthright

he bought for a bowl of lentils and whose blessing he stole through deception, the brother who promised to kill him. Jacob has divided his caravan into two camps so that if Esau strikes one, the other may escape (32:7–8). He has prayed (32:9–12). He has sent extravagant gifts ahead to soften Esau's anger (32:13–21). And then, having done everything he can, he sends his family across the river and stays alone in the dark.

The literal sense holds. This is a frightened man on the verge of meeting the brother he betrayed. Whatever happens at the Jabbok happens to a man already stripped of every defense by his own action. He does not retreat into the encounter; he is left in it.

The allegorical sense (*allegoria*)

The patristic reading of this passage is typological. Jacob is the type. The Christian reader is what the type figures.

The wrestling. The night struggle is read as the figure of contemplative prayer. Origen treats it briefly in the *Homilies on Genesis*; Ambrose develops it in the *De Iacob et vita beata*; Augustine returns to it in several sermons; Bernard of

Clairvaux preaches it in his *Sermons on Various Subjects*. The struggle is not against God but with God: *vaye'avek ish immo*, "and a man wrestled with him." The preposition matters. The contemplative is grappled by what he was reaching for.

The wound. The hollow of Jacob's thigh is touched and dislocated. The Christian typological reading takes the wound as the figure of grace's cost. Jacob does not emerge from the encounter undamaged; he limps for the rest of his life. The mystical tradition reads this as the standing pattern of authentic encounter with God: the encounter leaves a mark. John of the Cross's *noche oscura* reads the same shape at greater length. The soul that has been touched by God does not return to its previous gait.

The new name. Jacob asks to be blessed before he releases his grip. The blessing is the renaming. *Yisra-El* (יִשְׂרָאֵל), Israel, parses as *sara/sarita* (שָׂרָה, "to struggle, to strive, to contend, to have power") plus *El* ("God"): "one who has struggled with God." The text glosses itself: *for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed* (32:28). The new name names the struggle, not its end. Jacob is not Israel after the struggle; he is Israel because he held on

through it. The typological reading takes this as the figure of baptismal renaming: the Christian receives a new name in baptism, and the new name is given through participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, not before it.

The withheld name. Jacob asks: *Tell me, I pray thee, thy name.* The wrestler refuses: *Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?* And then, the text says, *he blessed him there*. The refusal is not punishment; it is followed by the blessing. The withholding is itself the way the name is given. The Christian apophatic tradition, from Pseudo-Dionysius through Eckhart through John of the Cross, reads this scene as the patriarchal prefiguration of *hyperousia*, beyond-being: God is not less than nameable; God is more than nameable, and the recognition of the more is what the contemplative tradition calls apophasis. The wrestler's silence is the same theological move written into Genesis before any apophatic theology has been written.

The tropological sense (*tropologia*)

What the text teaches the soul to do, the soul learns by doing what Jacob does. Jacob does three things, in this order: he stays, he holds on, and he asks for the blessing.

He stays. The text does not say he chose to wrestle. He was left alone, and the wrestling came to him. The first tropological lesson is that the encounter is not initiated by the soul; the soul's task is to remain in the place where the encounter can find it. John of the Cross's instruction in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* is the same: do not flee the dryness; do not invent consolations; remain.

He holds on. When the day begins to break, the wrestler asks to be released. Jacob, who has wrestled through the night, who has had his hip dislocated, who cannot have known whether he would survive the encounter, tightens his grip: *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.* The second lesson is that holding on is itself the response that turns the encounter from threat into gift. The withholding of the blessing is the form of its giving; refusing to release the one who is trying to leave is the way the blessing is asked for. The contemplative tradition reads this gesture as the model of perseverance in prayer.

He asks for the name. He has the blessing; he asks for more. The third lesson is that the soul that has been blessed asks for the name behind the blessing, and that the asking is not refused but answered by silence. The silence is the answer. To

ask for the name is the right move; to receive the silence as itself the name is the contemplative completion of the asking.

The anagogical sense (*anagogia*)

The passage figures the end. Jacob calls the place *Peniel*, the face of God: *I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved*. Exodus 33:20 will say that no one can see God's face and live. The patristic tradition reads this tension anagogically: what Jacob saw partially, in shadow, on the dark side of the river, the saints will see fully and in light at the end. The *visio Dei*, the beatific vision, is the consummation Peniel partially figures.

The bright counterpart appears in the gospels. On Mount Tabor (Matthew 17, Mark 9, Luke 9), three disciples are taken up and see the face of Christ shining as the sun, and his garments white as the light. The face that Jacob saw in shadow is seen in light. The Greek patristic tradition reads Tabor as the eschatological pole of the same encounter: what was given to one man at one ford, on the dark side, is given to all the elect at the end, in the light. The face of God is the same face. The conditions of the seeing change.

The throughline

The pattern recurs across scripture. **Job** in the whirlwind is met by God in extremity, given no explanation, and transformed by the encounter alone (Job 38–42). **Cain** is met by God too: *sin is crouching at the door; you must master it* (Gen 4:7). Cain does not hold on. The contrast lights up the thesis. **Christ at Gethsemane** is the new Jacob, wrestling in the dark, the cup not removed, the holding on absolute. The Christian reading completes the pattern: where Jacob emerges renamed, Christ emerges to die, and the death is itself the renaming of the human relation to God.

The figure holds. God will sometimes come to you in the dark, through struggle. Not to destroy you, not to explain himself, but to see whether you will hold on.

The Hebrew text plays Jacob (יַעֲקֹב, *Yaakov*), the Yabbok (יַבֹּק), and "wrestled" (וַיֵּאָבֵק, *vaye'avek*) against each other through the shared root letters. The play is preserved in the Masoretic text. English

translation cannot carry the sound; the bilingual reader is the only register in which the wordplay is intact.

Colophon

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