

## *Lecture 11*

### **JACOB AND THE ANGEL: STRUGGLE AND EMBRACE. ISRAEL AS THE ESSENCE THAT SEES GOD**

We already discussed how Jacob worked for seven years, pasturing Laban's flock, since this was the only ransom he could give for his beloved, Rachel, for, as we know, Jacob had left his father's house without a thing. We also considered how Laban showed his deceitfulness by giving to Jacob Leah in place of Rachel, and how Jacob therefore had to work another seven years. Six more years Jacob served for his wages – a part of Laban's flock. These twenty years that Jacob spent in the foreign land have made for his inner growth, his spiritual ascent. The ladder, which Jacob had seen in the beginning of his journey to Mesopotamia, pointed to the spiritual ascension that awaited him in Laban's house.

We also mentioned that Jacob's children born of his two wives and two concubines stand for the steps of this spiritual ascension. After Rachel, formerly barren, had borne Jacob a son, Joseph, God told Jacob: "Now leave this land at once and return to the land of your birth" (Gen 31:13). For with Joseph's birth (whose name means "he adds," "he multiplies"), i.e. with entering the stage of constant multiplication of the fruits of the spirit, the earthly way of a spiritual person comes to an end: he should return to his heavenly homeland of which the Holy Land is an archetype.

Now Jacob takes his wives and children and secretly flees Laban, realizing that he will try to hold him back so that the blessing, which has been descending on him through Jacob, may not leave. Laban lived by this blessing, for it was only through Jacob that Laban's flock multiplied and his household increasingly prospered.

Laban pursues Jacob; he is ready to overtake him and to take vengeance for his sudden escape; for Laban, who personifies the opposite spiritual nature, inwardly hates Jacob, although the blessing has been descending on him through Jacob. Laban wishes to keep appropriating Jacob's spiritual strength and for this sake he desires to hold him captive. Jacob in his turn longs to become free, to flee to God's land that has been promised to him and his descendants. However, Laban, who has almost overtaken Jacob, has a wonderful dream by night:

But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night, and said to him, "Take heed that you say not a word to Jacob, either good or bad." (*Gen 31:24*)

Laban probably has never before met God – neither in dream nor in reality. Now for the first time the Lord appeared to him in order to give him a warning: "...say not a word to Jacob, either good or bad." Can Laban, who personifies here

evil nature, sincerely say anything good? Therefore, God forbids Laban to address Jacob with any words. When Laban overtakes Jacob and accuses him, that he left without saying a word and carried away his daughters and grandchildren like captives, he says the following:

It is in my power to do you harm; but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Take heed that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.' (*Gen 31:29*)

Even after God's appearance to him Laban does not repent and says: "It is in my power to do you (pl) harm..." Whom does "you" mean? His own daughters and grandchildren and his son-in-law Jacob. "...But the God of your father spoke to me last night," goes on Laban. He does not recognize God as his God, he does not want to serve him and calls him "the God of your father." Nevertheless, he is scared and does not have the courage to do Jacob any harm.

Thus, Jacob escapes great danger. Now he is a free man, the prince of the entire clan, the head of a big family, and the owner of huge flocks (it may be observed in passing that everything in the Bible has a symbolic meaning, and that material riches belonging to a righteous person quite often stand for spiritual riches).

When Jacob set out for Mesopotamia, fleeing his brother, has addressed God in his prayer and made a vow unto him:

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one tenth to you." (*Gen 28:20-22*)

Thus, he took an oath to serve God if God protects his life and gives him bread and clothing. However, we see that God gave Jacob much more. The darkness of fears and anxieties which came over him when he was leaving his father's house, now has turned into the light of joy and hope as the psalm says:

They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright... (*Ps 112:4*)

The righteous clearly see that darkness turns into light in their way; their sufferings lead to joy, and things that formerly appeared to be evil bring deliverance:

I will turn the darkness before them into light... (*Isa 42:16*)

When Jacob crossed Jordan with only his staff, even then the Lord was his light. God appeared to Jacob a number of times, edifying him and giving him great promises. Now Jacob returns and sees that deep darkness has turned into the clear morning (*Am 5:8*). In his life the saying of the prophet Micah comes true:

...When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. (*Mic 7:8*)

Even deep darkness becomes light for the faithful of God, and their sufferings and trials turn into the source of never-ending joy.

Jacob constantly feels that God helps him. However, an extraordinary trial still lies ahead of him, a very unusual fight still awaits him. In Chapter 32 of the Book of Genesis we find the description of Jacob's struggle with an angel, which became one of the most famous Old Testament plots and is reflected in many works of art. In this connection, a reasonable question arises: how can man struggle with an angel, or, as some commentators put it, "struggle with God"?

Chapter 32 starts with the following words:

Jacob went on his way and the angels of God met him. (*Gen 32:1*)

These words have a special meaning. If anybody goes on his way, then guarding and directing angels of God will meet him. However, unfortunately, we frequently choose others' ways, realizing neither our true vocation, nor the road that has been determined for us by the Most High — we go on these ways, being led by evil powers and deceptive intentions...

The Bible in general speaks a lot about the way of each person. For example, the psalmist pleads with God:

See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (*Ps 139:24*)

The way of a person can be dangerous even if he is not aware of it. This is what the Book of Job says about such dangerous ways:

The caravans turn aside from their course; they go up into the waste, and perish. (*Job 6:18*)

As soon as someone "turns aside from" the commandments, from God's way, he finds himself in the "waste," where there is no water — the Lord's living word, no help from above, where people "perish" spiritually and physically. Therefore, the psalmist calls us to choose the right way:

"...To those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God." (*Ps 50:23*)

Certain people assume that it is enough for someone to believe in God, to admit his existence mentally, in order to be saved. However, this is not so: God demands that we go on his ways. In the Bible the way of a righteous person and God's ways are identified. The psalmist says:

I run the way of your commandments, for you enlarge my understanding. (*Ps 119:32*)

Human understanding is very "narrow," it embraces only a very small part of existence. Only God is able to "enlarge" our understanding, so that the spiritual sense of the commandments may be reflected in our consciousness. On page ... we already mentioned mysterious words of King Solomon, that God has put the whole world into man's heart (*Eccl 3:11*). The universe created by God has been entirely put into Adam's heart. However, to realize this fact our understanding should "be enlarged," and then it will become conscious of its great role, which consists in being the storehouse of the whole universe. Having grasped this role a

person will never more oppose to his calling; he will submit himself to God's will: "I run the way of your commandments, for you enlarge my understanding."

This is exactly what happened to Jacob: his ways became God's ways. It was not in vain that he had to spend twenty years at Laban's house: during this time he experienced great spiritual changes. He acquired the ability to see and to hear the spiritual world; he "clung to" God; he began to exalt him and to tremble before God's judgments, to fight with the evil inside and outside him. He became a virtuous and joyous man, receiving award from above, a living Temple, a dwelling-place for God's Spirit. Finally, he started bearing varied spiritual fruits... All this, as we have seen, is symbolically reflected in the names of his sons.

Now he is again on the threshold of the land of Canaan — the Promised Land. "Jacob went on his way..." In order to enter his way everyone should experience a spiritual transformation and find himself. The prophets call us: "call them to mind," "ponder it" (Deut 30:1, Ps 4:4 etc.). The best way for us is the way of uniting with the Lord and doing his will. Jesus Christ exhorted people:

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (*Mt 5:48*)

As long as we do not aspire the perfection of love, we are on someone else's way — that is why we do not see angels. Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.

When Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" So he called that place Mahanaim. (*Gen 32:2*)

The name Myncm <*Macha`nayim*> is a dual number of hncm <*macha`neh*> — "encampment," "camp," that is, "two camps." This is a place where "human camp" — Israel or Church — meets with "God's camp," i.e. with the angels glorifying the Creator. There men unite with the angels, giving praise to the Most High.

However, Jacob, who was glorifying God, now had to meet his brother Esau, who wished to kill him. Esau already knew about Jacob's homecoming and waited for him. So Jacob sends his servants to inform Esau of his arrival:

"Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob..." (*Gen 32:4*)

Telling Esau that he has lived at Laban's house, that he has gained some property and now is returning home, Jacob calls his brother "lord" and himself his "servant," although the right of the firstborn has belonged to him for a long time. Is it only because of the fear of his brother's revenge that he acts so? Certainly not. A spiritual person sees God's image in every man, no matter to what extent this man could sink. For this reason he calls his fellowman "lord," implying the higher essence of the person, which is created in God's image, according to his likeness. He worships God, whose image is reflected, at least to a degree, in any person, even in the most degraded one.

Yes, to some extent Jacob is a servant (*dbi c`eved*; on this word see page...). The purpose of his service is to arouse the highest divine nature, staying in eclipse and oblivion, in every person with whom the Lord brings him together. In this

sense, he is a “servant.” Jacob is a prototype of Jesus Christ, and as for Jesus, he said:

...Just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. (*Mt 20:28*)

Christ came to restore the trampled and darkened God’s image in everyone. Jacob says that he is Esau’s “servant,” for he is called to liberate Esau’s spiritual nature from the authority of evil powers.

Jacob ordered to tell Esau the above-mentioned words. After this the text says:

The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, an he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.” (*Gen 32:6*)

If a brother goes out to meet his brother, it is rather strange that he is accompanied by four hundred armed men. Jacob grasped Esau’s plan, for he was a prophet of God; he had God’s visions and heard the voice of the Most High. He knew that Abraham had been told from above:

...Your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years... (*Gen 15:13*)

Probably, Jacob saw in these four hundred people, who went to meet him together with Esau, the prototype of the four-century enslavement and oppression, predicted to Abraham. Indeed, Jacob did not yet know who exactly would become the oppressor of his children: perhaps, Esau and his descendants; and, perhaps, these four hundred soldiers, Esau’s servants, were the symbol of it? Therefore, Jacob makes every effort to appease his brother. First of all he addresses God for help:

And Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good,’

I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two companies.

Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him; he may come and kill us all, the mothers with the children. (*Gen 32:9–11*)

Then Jacob, hoping to calm down his brother’s anger by presents, sends him a gift of 550 domestic animals:

...Two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams,

Thirty milch camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. (*Gen 32:14–15*)

Why did Jacob send exactly this number of domestic animals? The numerical value of the Hebrew verb *Nqt* *<ta’kan>* — “to straighten,” “to restore,” “to correct” — is precisely 550. Jacob tries “to correct” Esau’s soul with the help of prayer and gifts, “to correct” that evil which produces enmity and hatred, and to restore brotherly relations with him.

Jacob spares no effort to meet Esau peacefully, to placate him. Now, a very unusual thing happens to him. Having sent his family across the stream, Jacob returns to the other side of the river, where he can be all by himself, obviously, for a prayer and meditation. When night fell,

Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.  
When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.  
Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me."  
So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."  
Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed."  
Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him.  
So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved."  
The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. (*Gen 32:24–31*)

It is a very unusual description, which is hard to understand at once. Who wrestled with Jacob? Some commentators state that it was God himself. However, can God struggle with any man and "not prevail against" him? Would God ask someone to let him go, "for the day is breaking"? In addition, the text does not say that it was God; it says "a man," Heb. *wya* <*eesh*> — "a man," "a male." This term can denote not only people, but also angels. For example, the Book of the prophet Daniel says that Daniel saw an angel, who looked as "a man clothed in linen" (Dan 10:5). According to a legend, one of the categories of angels is called *Mywya* <*ee`shim*> — literally, "men," while the other categories are called cherubim, seraphim, ophanim etc.

What kind of an angel it was? Why did one of those angels, who were sent to the patriarchs for guidance, as we have seen before, begin to wrestle with Jacob all of a sudden? It was Esau's guardian angel, which did not want Jacob to enter the land of Canaan and to make use of the rights given to him by his father. In the Book of Daniel we read that nations have their guardian angels; for example, Michael, the guardian of Israel, fought against the guardian angel of Persian kings (Dan 10:13). One of the angels describes the mentioned fight to Daniel:

"...Now I must return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I am through with him, the prince of Greece will come..." (*Dan 10:20*)

It appears that Greece, Persia, Israel and other nations have their angels, each of which is a protector of a particular nation. To this category of angels belonged the one who wrestled with Jacob — Esau's guardian. It is surprising that he failed to overcome Jacob. Jacob describes the situation this way: "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." Jacob always sought God's face; therefore, God helped him to do a supernatural thing — to overcome an angel by a prayerful effort. As for the angel, he admits Jacob's victory over him and says: "...you have striven with angels [or: "with spirits"] and with humans, and have prevailed." This is a literal translation of the given verse. The word *Myhla* <*elo`him*> means not only "God," as in the beginning of the Book of Genesis, but also angels, the spiritual beings, having power and authority (cf. 1 Sam 28:13, Ps 82:6). This word

is the plural form of *hvla* <*elo`ah*>. In the story about Jacob's struggle the plural number is emphasized by the parallel use of the word *Mywna* <*ana`shim*>, i.e. "men."

The angel does not know Jacob's name and asks him: "What is your name?" God never asked Abraham or Moses what were their names; he himself gave new names to his servants, for example: "No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham..." (Gen 17:5). The angel did not know Jacob's name, for God had hidden this name from him, so that he might not do Jacob any harm. According to the most ancient views of the whole mankind, if a man knows someone's name, he has a certain power over him and can cause him harm. Having been defeated, the angel lost the opportunity to cause any evil, and Jacob tells him his name.

However, why does the angel say: "Let me go, for the day is breaking"? God, certainly, would not address a man in such a way: God is omnipotent! The point is that the angelic choruses should sing praises to the Most High at dawn. The Book of Job tells us that the angels "shout for joy" when "the morning stars" appear (i.e. before sunrise)

...When the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy... (*Job 38:7*)

Esau's guardian angel is afraid to be late for daybreak, he fears that he will not be in time for the song of praise; that is why he asks Jacob: "Let me go, for the day is breaking." However, Jacob does not release him: "I will not let you go, unless you bless me," i.e. unless you acknowledge my birthright, my right to the father's blessing and to the Holy Land. Then the angel names him "Israel" and explains it this way: "For you have striven with angels and with humans, and have prevailed."

Had it been God and not the angel, the subsequent repeated blessing of Jacob with a change of his name would not have had sense. Indeed, when Jacob returned to the land of Canaan (Chapter 35), the following happened to him:

God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and he blessed him. God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall you be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So he was called Israel. (*Gen 35:9-10*)

It means that initially this name was given by the angel and only then by God, when he approved the angel's words. As for the angel, it was by God's will and not by chance that he called Jacob "Israel," having been defeated by him.

Now we shall put the following question. Surely, man cannot struggle with God, but can man struggle with an angel? We know that angels are exceptionally powerful. It is evident that the described situation occurred in a vision. It was not a physical fight, but an intense spiritual struggle, and Jacob was a winner. This struggle took place inside the forefather, in his spiritual world, for it is said: "Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak..."

"Jacob was left alone"... When a person is left alone, with whom else can he struggle in such a situation if not with himself? We remember that Esau is an external, carnal man, and Jacob is a spiritual man. Each of us has his "Esau" inside — a dangerous, vindictive, selfish and aggressive man, and has his "Jacob" —

peaceful, “living in tents,” heeding God’s word. It is clear that two of them begin to struggle. How can “Jacob” overcome “Esau” in this struggle? First, he needs to overcome “Esau’s guardian angel,” i.e. to block up the internal source of evil intentions. Such source is bitter selfishness, which produces envy and hatred to the neighbor and the stranger alike. It is necessary to overcome Esau spiritually — only after that peace will be established in the person.

After Jacob’s victory over the angel the two brothers meet and part peacefully: they do not hinder each other any more — everyone goes on his own way. For there is enough place in the land for both Jacob and Esau. There was a spiritual reason for what Esau was going to do — to oppose Jacob, to murder him, to exterminate or to take captive his children and wives. Not the land, but the birthright, the election and the blessing were the subject of their controversy. One of the first religious wars, the war between Jacob and Esau, was about to break out, for both of them pretended to the birthright. As we remember, the first murder on earth was also caused by religious motives. Having defeated “Esau” in himself, having defeated his angel, Jacob later gained an external victory as well; for the one who overcomes angels will overcome people too. The one who gains a spiritual victory in the same way wins at the external level. Thus, everything that is described here takes place inside a person and is a great exhortation for us.

When Jacob meets Esau, their meeting is very different from what he has expected: all his fears and anxieties miraculously vanish. It is a meeting of two brothers, not two enemies. For “Esau,” the animal nature of a person, being left without its destructive aggressiveness and malice, becomes peaceful and safe; it does not threaten “Jacob,” the spiritual nature, any more.

Jacob led his children and wives to meet Esau.

He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother. But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. (*Gen 33:3–4*)

All Esau’s rage disappeared, because the angel supporting him had been defeated earlier. The angel was compelled to bless Jacob, and therefore, later Esau blesses Jacob as well. This highly egotistic, carnal person, who tries to struggle with our spiritual nature, is not dangerous if his “angel” has been already defeated in us. In this case, the carnal person does not fight with the spiritual one; it simply performs its function, because flesh and its animal powers are necessary for our earthly life. But woe unto us if this “Esau” pretends to the birthright — it should belong to “Jacob,” i.e. to the human spirit.

Now it becomes clear why Jacob addresses his brother, with whom he has just reconciled, with such words:

...If I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand... (*Gen 33:10*)

The spiritual man has something that he can give to the carnal man, for the great joy of spiritual life and the delight of abiding with God affect everything that constitutes a man, as David says:

Then my soul shall rejoice in the Lord, exulting in his deliverance.  
All my bones shall say, “O Lord, who is like you? You deliver the weak from

those too strong for them, the weak and needy from those who despoil them.” (*Ps* 35:9–10)

The soul, the interior and even the bones of a righteous person — everything rejoices together with his spirit. Thus, “the interior person” has something that he can offer to “the external person.”

...Accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God — since you have received me with such favor. (*Gen* 33:10)

Here the original text uses the same word *Myhla* <elo'him> in the sense of “angel”: “...like seeing the face of an angel...” In other words: “When we met I saw that your face was joyful, for I had seen earlier the face of your angel and had defeated him.” For now Jacob realized with whom he had wrestled and what was the reason of a change in his relations with his brother. Having overcome the angel, he asked him: “What is your name?” We remember that the angel did not reveal his name to Jacob. Now, having met his brother (we should not forget that more than twenty years have passed, and that Esau has changed very much), Jacob sees his features and understands with whom he wrestled: “...I saw your face like a vision of the face of an angel, and you received me with such favor...” — this translation is closer to the original. According to a legend, the guardian angel of a person has a similar appearance with him. That is why the past tense is used: “...you received me with such favor...”

Thus, Jacob acquires a new name — Israel, one of the most important names in the Bible. We shall consider the prototypical meaning of this name at several levels.

The name *larwy* <Yisra'el>, Israel, is made up of two words: *hrw* <sa'rah> — “to struggle,” “to fight” (the form *hrwy* <Yis'rah> means “[he] will fight”) and *la* <El> — “God.” Israel is “God’s warrior,” the one who defeats, with God’s help, both the guardian angels of evil powers and people subjected to them.

Another meaning of the verb *hrw* <sa'rah> is “to reign,” therefore, Israel is also “God’s prince.” As early as the time of Abraham the Hittites told the patriarch: “...you are a mighty prince among us...” (*Gen* 23:6). Israel is the one that is called to proclaim God’s name to the nations, i.e. to reign on behalf of God, not physically, but spiritually, establishing the authority of the Most High. At the same time, the word *wy* <yesh> means “essence,” “life,” and the word *rw* <shar> means “singing.” Israel is “the essence singing praises to God.” In addition, the third and the fourth letters of the name *larwy* <Yisra'el>, *r* <reysh> and *a* <aleph>, also point to the verb *har* <ra'ah> — “to see.”

Putting together all the above listed meanings, we get: “the essence that fights, reigns, sings, sees God” — this is what Israel represents in a spiritual sense.

However, there is one more meaning of the given name: *rwy* <ya'shar> means “upright,” “righteous one.” Israel is “the righteous one of God.” It is also possible to translate otherwise: “God is righteous.” God shows his righteousness in the story of Jacob-Israel and his descendants, for in the Jewish history God fulfills his great promises most visibly, carries out his greatest prophecies. Actually, the whole history of the people of Israel is fulfillment of God’s prophecies, vindication of his great name.

Everything that we have said about the meaning of the patriarch's new name, applies also to the nation that descended from him. This nation is called to fight in the name of God for spreading Monotheism in the whole world; it is God's "warrior." It is through the Jewish nation that the whole mankind has heard the teaching about the one God. God himself is revealed through this nation; it led many spiritual fights for preservation, establishment and spreading of Monotheism. All the three monotheistic religions that are engaged in mighty battles against dark powers are linked with each other, and their source is in Israel.

The people of Israel, whether they are respected or humiliated, should rule over evil spiritually, should continually overcome themselves in order to observe God's commandments. For this reason they are also called "God's ruler," "God's prince."

Further, this nation is "God's singer": let us recollect that the rich musical tradition of the ancient Jews, the heritage of the Levites singing in the Jerusalem Temple, became a basis of modern ecclesiastical chanting in both Eastern and Western Churches.

Finally, the highest calling of this nation is "to see God," i.e. to discern spiritual things. There is a prediction in the Scripture concerning the age when all the sons of Israel will become prophets (Num 11:29, Ezek 39:28–29, Joel 2:27–28).

As we have already mentioned, in the history of the people of Israel God's righteousness was revealed most visibly; for God is impartial: "...from everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required..." (Lk 12:48). It has been given much more to Israel than to others — God revealed himself to them. For this reason throughout several millennia it has been required much more from Israel, than from any other nation. On the same day when God declared his commandments to Israel, he told about the punishment for their violation (Ex 20:5). God warned the Israelites:

... You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. (*Am 3:2*)

The centuries-old physical and spiritual history of the people of Israel is predicted by King David in one of his psalms:

You have made us like sheep for slaughter, and have scattered us among the nations...

<...>

... You have made us the taunt of our neighbors, the derision and scorn of those around us.

You have made us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples.

All day long my disgrace is before me, and shame has covered my face at the words of the taunters and revilers, at the sight of the enemy and the avenger.

All this has come upon us, yet we not forgotten you, or been false to your covenant.

Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way, yet you have broken us in the haunt of jackals, and covered us with deep darkness.

If we had forgotten the name of our God, or spread out our hands to a strange god, would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart.

Because of you we are being killed all day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter. (*Ps 44:11–23*)

This psalm clearly states that all the sufferings of the people of Israel in their dispersion where they are a byword, a laughing-stock, scorn and disgrace, where they are exterminated, destroyed, persecuted, being the object of slander and lies — all these sufferings promote the spiritual growth of the people, their purification, their growing in love, their return to God. The same was true of Jacob the forefather: severe sufferings only strengthened him on God's way. The same happens with whole nations and with every believer individually. When sufferings befall us, we address God most sincerely, with our whole heart. This is the hidden meaning of that darkness of sufferings and trials, which embraces the nations: when we address God, then gloom turns into light for us.

Everything that we have said about Israel applies to the Church as well. The words of the mentioned psalm also refer to the spiritual descendants of Israel — the saints and martyrs of the Church of Christ: "...Because of you we are being killed all day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter." The Church, as well as Jacob-Israel, is called to fight in the name of God. The Church is called to dominate spiritually as Jesus bequeathed to apostle Peter: "Feed my lambs." (John 21:15). The Church sings praises to God and glorifies him. In the Church the name of God is vindicated, his righteousness is proclaimed. The sense of the existence of the Church consists in leading people in the straight way of God. All these images are present in the name "Israel."

In the New Testament we find the following definitions of Israel: "Israel according to the flesh" (1 Cor 10:18, footnote) and "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16), i.e. Israel according to the spirit. For example, in the Book of Romans we read that the Church joins in the promises given to Israel. It is explained how Gentile believers are grafted in the stem of ancient Israel and are united with God's people:

If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy. (*Rom 11:16*)

Thus, if "the part of the dough offered as first fruits," the root of Israel, is holy, then the branches also are holy; the whole nation is holy unless it is separated from the "root," the source of its life, the Holy Spirit.

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches... (*Rom 11:17-18*)

Some of the branches "were broken off" from the "olive tree of Israel" because of their unbelief in God, in his promises; these branches have dried up and lie on the ground near the olive tree. In their place God grafted in Gentile believers, having taken them from the "wild olive" — Gentile teaching in which they had stayed formerly. They began "to share the rich root of the olive tree" of Israel, i.e. joined in the Word of God, in the Holy Spirit and in the promises which had been given to the ancient patriarchs.

...If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. (*Rom 11:18*)

God's Spirit revives all the branches of the olive tree, both the natural and the grafted ones, and all of them are nourished by the same sap.

You will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.”  
That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe.  
For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you.

Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.

And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.

For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree. (*Rom 11:19–24*)

Therefore, God has promised to give those Israelites who stay in unbelief, who have fallen and have become hardened, the opportunity to repent, to return to God’s way, to be grafted back into their own stem of faith in order to “share the rich root” of the spiritual family tree that goes back to the patriarchs of the Jewish people. Then the Kingdom of God in its fullness will triumph on the earth; then all the peoples of the world will constitute one people — the people of God.

However, there is one more profound prototypical sense of the name “Israel.” Israel symbolizes the internal person. Everything that we have discussed until now concerned the external history — the history of the ancient Jews, of the Church, of all mankind. Yet, the name “Israel” has a meaning that relates personally to us, to our internal life. Let us reflect on the name “Israel” from this point of view.

“God is righteous,” *la rwy* <*ya`shar El*>, — such is the meaning of the name “Israel” that is fulfilled in the life of every genuine believer. For the straight ways of God become the ways of a righteous person, and the Lord’s predestinations are carried out in his life. If we consider the name *larwy* <*Yisra`el*> once more, dividing it into several parts: “yesh sar/shar roeh El,” i.e. “the essence that dominates, sings, sees God,” we will see those steps of spiritual growth that our internal person should successively pass in order to reach a state which Jesus Christ described this way:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (*Mt 5:8*)

Indeed, “seeing,” “beholding” God is the fourth and the last of the spiritual steps, incorporated in the name “Israel.” The first step is identifying oneself as an immortal spiritual essence — “yesh.” The second one is a state of “sar,” when this spiritual essence submits to itself all the lowest powers of a human being. The third step is a state of “shar”: incessant glorifying God and “singing praises” to him. Finally, the fourth step is a state of “roeh El”: “seeing” God. However, can anyone see God? For in the Scripture we find the following words about the Most High:

...It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see... (*1 Tim 6:16*)

Thus, it is clearly said that no human being can see God. Nevertheless, let us recollect once more the words from the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (*Mt 5:8*). The Book of Exodus says that when Moses and the elders went up on Mount Sinai, “they saw the God of Israel. Under

his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness” (Ex 24:10). In the Book of Isaiah there is a description of a following vision:

...I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. (*Isa 6:1*)

We read in the Bible that the patriarchs, Moses, the elders, the prophets, the apostles, the saints, the pure in heart saw God... At the same time, the evangelist John says:

No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known. (*John 1:18*)

The Lord said to Moses:

...You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live. (*Ex 33:20*)

Many righteous people in the Old Testament, when God appeared to them, said:

“Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (*Isa 6:5*)

How should we understand all this? The answer is that when we read that one cannot see God and live, a person in a fallen condition is meant, the one who is external, carnal or unspiritual, the one who considers everything spiritual to be foolishness (1 Cor 2:14). Such person “cannot see God,” for if it happens, the divine Light, the purest Spirituality will blind, destroy, burn him. The same revelation of God’s Face, the same act of seeing God produces an opposite effect on the wicked and the righteous, on carnal and spiritual people:

See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and the evil-doers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.

But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. (*Mal 4:1-2*)

“The sun of righteousness is rising”: God reveals himself to people. All the arrogant and the evil-doers are burned up by this sun like stubble. As for the spiritual people who seek God and revere his name, they see the sun of righteousness and receive “healing in its wings.” That is why those people who were forbidden by God to go up the mountain during the great Sinaitic Theophany are symbolically likened to animals, for in these people animal powers that constitute a carnal person dominate over the power of the spirit:

You shall set limits for the people all around, saying, ‘Be careful not to go up the mountain or touch the edge of it. Any who touch the mountain shall be put to death.

No hand shall touch them, but they shall be stoned or shot with arrows; whether animal or human being, they shall not live.’ (*Ex 19:12-13*)

“Whether animal or human being...” Animal is mentioned first, then comes human being. The meaning is that people in whom the animal nature dominates over the human nature should not approach “the holy mountain.” Jesus Christ meant such people when he taught:

Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you. (*Mt 7:6*)

It is evident that Jesus did not mean dogs or swine but those people who have likened themselves to dogs and swine. Therefore, God said through Moses: “...whether animal or human being, they shall not live...” Thus, the warning concerns only those people who live like animals. When the person starts his spiritual ascension, he is permitted to go up “the holy mountain”; therefore, we are told that Moses and the elders went up on Mount Sinai and saw the God of Israel. They were the people who represented true, spiritual, Israel, i.e. “the essence that sees God.”

Concerning the needs of the animal nature of a person Jesus said: “...your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (*Mt 6:32–33*). If everyone starts to seek the kingdom of God inside and outside himself, if the whole people strive for the kingdom of God, then everything material will be also given to them. If a person or the people forget God and begin to seek only bread and clothes, then bread and clothes will be taken away from them. God gave people the following promise concerning his holy words:

When ... you call them to mind...  
<...>  
...Then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you... (*Deut 30:1–3*)

Owing to the Fall, each one of us lost these “fortunes” of being close to God, which he had possessed originally. These very “fortunes” are restored to us if we repent.

In order to restore these “fortunes” it is necessary to start seeking God with one’s whole heart. In the Old Testament the heart is believed to be a receptacle for thought, feelings, intentions, volition, desires and passions. To seek God with one’s whole heart means to seek him with all one’s thoughts and feelings, volition and desires... For example, David says:

With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments.  
(*Ps 119:10*)

The psalmist David is always as sincere as one can be: if he states that he seeks God with his whole heart, we trust him. There were not a few righteous persons in history, which sought the Most High with the whole heart:

...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. (*Deut 6:5*)

For that reason it is said: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God”; it is possible to “see with one’s heart” only when it is purified of everything that is not seeking God. People seek lots of things in their life: they seek saturation, satisfaction of their physical needs, various pleasures, delights, contentment, honor, glory... However, they are in effect spiritually dead until they start seeking God. This very essence which is implied by the word “yesh” in the name “Israel” and which is able to see God is identical with the internal person. Gradually, in the process of his spiritual growth, a person first ceases to identify himself with his body, then with his soul, i.e. with the sphere of feelings, will, desires etc. At a higher level he ceases to identify himself with his mind as well, with his knowledge, with his experience that he has gained during his earthly life. Finally, he “turns to his heart” — he starts to recognize himself as “yesh,” the immortal essence, the absolute “self” which longs for God as its source. Neither the strongest physical thirst, nor the strongest emotional desire of the person in this world can be compared to the thirst for God in its authoritativeness and might:

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. (*Ps 42:1*)

The deer longs and thirsts quite differently as compared with man. If man is tormented by thirst and suffers much, there is still his willpower, the opportunity to restrain, to control himself. We know various cases of heroism when people suffering from thirst in the waste, nevertheless had the power to go the whole way, to carry out their calling. But deer is an animal that is entirely submitted to its internal impulses. When the deer thirsts in the waste, it directs all its energy to the search for water; all its essence is seized with one desire — to slake its thirst. It appears that the spiritual longing can and should have similar force: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (*Ps 42:2*). It was in such a state that the forefather Jacob gained victory over the angel.

Thus, let us list once again the principal semantic layers present in the description of Jacob’s destiny. The literal sense of its events serves as a prototype, first, of the history of Jacob’s descendants, the Jewish people; second, of the Church history; and, last, of the history of the internal person, “the essence that sees God.” Without understanding this history of the human spirit, the first two semantic layers lose their meaning. For the Church history or the history of the people is impossible without the history of those individuals that constitute them. Before all those things that we have considered are carried out at the level of one person, the whole Church or the whole mankind, they should be fulfilled in the inner world of every individual person.

All biblical stories telling us about the ways of patriarchs, their wanderings, meetings, fights and reconciliations, describe our own inner world. In order to comprehend this truth in its entirety, it is necessary to get a grasp of each word. We frequently read the text inattentively, not paying attention to the biblical figures of speech, to the context, to the interrelation of various descriptions; and all these things have the inmost meaning. In fact, the Bible is the code of both our common destiny and the life of each of us. Learning to read the Bible properly, we learn to read and to understand better what is written in the book of our own life, to grasp the things that happen to us day by day. For everything around us is just symbols, indications, images, and reflections of the supreme world. When we

begin to understand these symbols, indications and images better, when we have the right attitude towards them, we enter the dialogue with our Lord, with the higher spiritual realm; then what it is written in the Epistle to the Hebrews comes true:

...But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels...

...And to the spirits of the righteous made perfect... (*Heb 12:22–23*)

It is obvious that we are not the first on this way — many people have passed it before us, starting with patriarchs. If we imitate them as far as possible, if we walk step by step on their earthly roads, we will gradually come to the same place where they came. Where are they now? We can judge about it from the words of Jesus Christ:

I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven... (*Mt 8:11*)

Thus, if we follow in the footsteps of the righteous patriarchs, we will enter this Kingdom after them...