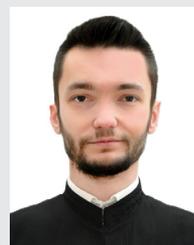


JACOB WRESTLES AT PENIEL – THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE “GOD-MAN” AND THE “MAN-GOD” (GN 32:24-25)

Abstract

The study analyses the fragment from Genesis 32, 24-25, highlighting the spiritual and theological significance of the encounter between Jacob and the “man” who turns out to be God. Through a detailed exegetical approach, the work discerns the narrative’s complexity, emphasizing the broader context in which this confrontation is situated. The struggle symbolizes not only a physical confrontation, but also a spiritual journey, as Jacob is challenged to recognize his weaknesses and dependence on God. The study interprets the transcendent side of the encounter, in which the anonymized identification of the “man” emphasizes the fact that divinity has chosen to make itself accessible to man. The struggle becomes a means through which Jacob transforms his identity, moving from self-sufficiency to a profound recognition of his need for divine help. Thus, exegetical observations on the meanings of paronymic words and the connections between the name Jacob and the Jabbok River are explored to highlight the interdependence between man and God. In conclusion, the study suggests that this biblical experience is relevant to meeting contemporary challenges, urging readers to reflect on their own spiritual quest and their relationship with divinity, highlighting that true strength and inner peace derive from accepting dependence on God.



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Prolegomena

The fragment of Genesis 32:24-32, subjected to exegetical analysis, has, since ancient times, given rise to profound theological exegesis, most of which rests on the thesis that the narrative must be understood as a derivative of the additions relating to some verses in this textual structure. We do not intend to analyse this debate; we only note that most exegetes, including HJ Hermisson (1974, 239-261) and A. de Pury (1979, 18-34), consider verse 33 in the BHS version to have been added later. A growing number of commentators, including P. Volz (Volz 1933, 63), say the same about verses 28 and 29, because, like verse 33, these verses also speak of Israel. Some also consider verse 31b secondary because it does not fit the narrative thread. At the same time, other scholars, such as E. Otto (Otto 1979, 24-158) and G. Hentschel (Hentschel 1977, 13-37), argue that verse 26, or at least verse 26b, is also secondary, being the verse that has so far raised the most significant difficulties for exegetes. However, there are still no sufficiently solid arguments to support these views. In this sense, it is concluded that the remaining verses, namely 23-26a, 27, 30, 31a, and 32 (BHS), provide a self-contained, intelligible narrative (Westermann 1985, 514).

The exposition of the narrative, whose action begins in verse 24 [25], consists of an itinerary note that aligns with the story's character as a traveller's experience. If the exposition is read without verse 23a [24a], it appears as a unit and contains the following elements: chronological note, initially autonomous and independent of the narrative that follows; Jacob crosses the ford with his entourage and his belongings (the family and possessions are mentioned only here). The repetition of verse 22 [23] in verse 23a [24a] should be understood as a connection between the itinerary and the following narrative (Westermann 1985, 515-6).

Even if the theme of our scriptural episode is the struggle, an aspect that no exegete disputes, in this exegetical approach we cannot isolate this Old Testament passage from the context of the entire cycle of episodes that are directly related to Jacob, especially since this connection and formal similarity is automatically proven by the wordplay that appears in the scene: יַעֲקֹב (*ya^aqōb*/ Jacob) – the man, יַבְבֹּק (*yabbōq*/Iaboc) – the location and אָבַק [*abaq* – “to fight” (*yēābēq*)] – the action, the consonant pattern being *y'qb/ybq/y'bq* (verses 24 and 25). Thus, these paronymous words (very similar in form and phonetics) attract the reader's attention. As a result, for Jacob to be able to cross the Jabbok to the blessed land, he must struggle. Regarding this aspect, Fokkelman states that the grabbing of his brother Esau by the heel *'qb* led Jacob to endure an extreme

consequence: the struggle *'bq* with a *man*, which will make him live the most intense experience of his life, as is evident from the fact that once this is consumed, Jacob will live on under a changed name (Skolnik and Berenbaum 2007, 19), as a new being, and under this name he will become the patriarch of the “Israelites” (Fokkelman 1975, 210).

Although it is relatively short, the passage we wish to analyse (Gn 32:24-25) is highly concentrated and rich in spiritual teachings. Still, it is, to the same extent, also very ambiguous and, due to the lack of details, raises many questions, which is why our analysis aims to be illuminating, especially since there is increasing talk about how man can see God and, of course, whether this is possible during earthly life. The study will explore the transcendent encounter between the human and the divine, emphasizing the fact that Jacob, through struggle, recognizes his dependence on God. We will highlight the symbolism of struggle, which responds to Jacob's fears and becomes a path to spiritual transformation. The primary teaching emerges from the awareness that man needs his God, not the other way around, highlighting the importance of faith and divine acceptance. Through a detailed exegetical analysis, the text combines elements of theology, spirituality, and anthropology, inviting the reader to reflect on their own dependence on divinity amid inner struggle and the search for the meaning of life.

The transcendent encounter between the human and the divine

The story of the encounter begins, according to the NIV and TEV, with the phrase “So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day” (Gn 32:24) ^[1]. Thus, the textual structure “a man wrestled with him” ^[2] suggests that the “man” (that Someone) was the one who initiated the attack, the one who took Jacob by surprise, so that the anonymous qualification “a man” renders the mysterious identity of this person, no one knowing who he is, not even Jacob himself, at an initial stage, a fact that suggests the transcendent nature of this man. Jacob will identify him with God (Gn 32:30 [31]), a connection the prophet Hosea will later make (Hos 12:3-4). The simple qualification of “man” ^[3] is a means of emphasizing his human individuality and functions as a contrast to divinity (Gn 32:28 [29]; Is 2:11, 17; Nm 23:19; Hos 11:9), the same language being used by Isaiah in his description of the suffering Servant – the Messiah (Is 53:3). Also, the fact that God takes human form to meet people is not unheard of (Gn 18:1, 17; Jgs 6:11; 13:3). The same term, “man” (אִישׁ – *ish*) ^[4], is used by Daniel to designate the “heavenly High Priest” (Dn 10:5) and the “commander of the army” [שַׂר הַצְּבָאָה – *sar hatsaba* – (Dn 8:11)], an expression that denotes the

Lord Himself (Jo 5:14-15). Thus, it is not unusual for supernatural beings in the Old Testament to take on human form (Hamilton 1995, 330).

It is therefore not surprising that rabbinical interpretations identified the “man” who wrestles with Jacob with the awaited Messiah and High Priest who “serves” in heavenly Zion. In the same sense, the Christian tradition identified this “Angel” with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, according to other scriptural versions (Doukhan 2016, 372).

“In Genesis 31:13 Malach-Yahweh, whom Jacob saw in his sleep, was called the God of Bethel (El Bethel), because Yahweh had also appeared to Jacob at Bethel (Gn 28:11). The unknown with whom Jacob wrestles all night and who before the break of dawn reveals himself to him as God, is called Malach-Yahweh by Hos 12:4” (our translation) (Negoiță 2004, 84).

Thus, “the biblical text tells us about a person with a dual nature: human and God” (Comănescu 2009, 33). In this same sense, St. Ambrose of Milan states:

“And what else would it mean to fight with God, then to set out to fight on the path of virtue, to open the fight with someone stronger than you, and to make yourself better in all respects, resembling God? And since his faith and piety were invincible, the Lord made him understand the hidden mysteries by touching the joint of his thigh, showing him thereby that the Lord Jesus would have to rise by birth from a virgin, a thing that is neither inappropriate nor unworthy of God, a fact that was shown in an ineffable way by the cross on the joint of his thigh, which will mean the outpouring of salvation and forgiveness of sins for all those who share, through the numbness and sleep of the body, in the resurrection from the dead. Therefore, it was not unjustly that the sun rose from the right of Jacob, from the tribe of from which the saving cross of the Lord would shine, from where the Sun of righteousness would also rise, through which we understand God Himself, because He alone is the eternal light.” (our translation) (Sf. Ambrozie al Milanului 2007, 280-1)

We also see in the text of Holy Scripture that “the man” ^[5] is the one who fights, because nothing is mentioned about the response of Jacob, who must certainly have been overwhelmed by the attack and completely unprepared, especially since the fight takes place at night, which is why “solitude and darkness are, in themselves, imprints of a divine presence. Jacob is chosen to perform an important ritual, a kind

of baptism; a man's name is the expression of his being, and his change is equivalent to a transfiguration” (Pleșu 2003, 238). In the light of Saint Gregory of Nyssa's teaching, we can observe that authentic knowledge of God takes place in darkness, not in light. This emphasizes that man's struggle with God represents one of the most important steps he can take towards divinity. In this struggle, man can communicate directly with God to ask Him questions and receive answers. Night and darkness are considered the ideal environments for practicing spirituality, for introspection (Ps 4:4), meditation (Ps 63:4) and prayer (Lk 6:12). In moments of solitude, the human soul opens and allows the dialogue with God to become deeper and more authentic (Ps 77:6; Dn 10:8; Jn 16:32) (Spence-Jones 2004, 395). On the other hand, Rabbi Luria states that night is the propitious time for spiritual ascents to heaven (Moshe 2008, 83). Then, the aspect that attracts attention is that this “confrontation”, this “fight” to deserve our sight, is initiated by God Himself. Why do we affirm this? Because God awaits Jacob, he challenges him. He prepared this fight, knowing that it is the most significant test, in which lies the condition of remaining definitively with Him or of moving away forever. Jacob did not avoid this confrontation but stayed there, having the courage to fight ^[6].

We thus see that the time of the fight (night) has a bivalent meaning. On the one hand, the fact that the “adversary” wanted to leave at dawn shows that the night visit was part of a plan, because if he had come during the day he would have been recognized by Jacob as an authority (v. 29) and as a specific identity (v. 30b), which is why if Jacob had known with whom he was going to fight he would not have initiated this fight nor would he have engaged in it so fiercely. On the other hand, the duration of the fight until dawn suggests a long and hesitant/indecisive confrontation, the “attacker” resorting to something extraordinary (Von Rad 1972, 320). Therefore, the climax of the long struggle becomes clear: after a long and hesitant struggle, the “man” “touched” Jacob ^[7].

The symbolic meanings of Jacob's confrontation with God

Verse 25 (“But when he saw that he could not prevail against him, he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh ^[8] and dislocated the socket of Jacob's thigh as he wrestled with him”) reveals that the Lord had injured Jacob's hip, making him lame ^[9] from that moment on. God's “weakness” in His “confrontation” with men is an expression of His grace and love, but also of the mystery of His incarnation to reach men and save them. This impression of weakness is immediately contradicted by the next movement of the

“man”: he touched the socket of Jacob’s thigh ^[10] and dislocated his hip. Thus, a simple touch was enough to cause the dislocation, suggesting superhuman power (Curtis 1987, 134).

Also, the location of the blow, namely the “hip joint/groin of the thigh” (כַּף יֶרֶקָ – *kap yerēka*) of Jacob, was not chosen by chance. The Hebrew word for “hip” (יֶרֶק – *yerek*) refers to the thigh (Gn 24:9; 47:29) and is identified with “the general area of the body which constitutes the seat of procreative power” ^[11], that is, with the genital area (“hip”) (Smith 1990, 468; Geller 1982, 52). In Holy Scripture, according to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, the thighs are “the parts of the body necessary for the birth of children and therefore, the birth itself. For between the thighs are for all the members necessary for the birth of children” ^[12]. The divine touch is, in this way, an implicit blessing that refers to the descendants/offspring of Jacob (Gn 46:26; Ex 1:5). Therefore, since the term כַּף־ (*kap-*) connotes the idea of a hole/hollowness in something, and יֶרֶק (*yārēk*) can mean “intimate area,” it is possible that the כַּף־יֶרֶקָ (*kapyrēkô*) to refer to the male genital area rather than to a part of the hip ^[13]. Given the references to “hips” in patriarchal traditions, it is inconceivable that later Israelites would not have taken up the national meaning of the verse, namely that Jacob, the ancestor of Israel, had his hip struck and from this hip came the later Israel (Doukhan 2016, 373) ^[14]. At the same time, the writer Josephus Flavius in his work “Antiquities of the Jews” writes that after all those in Jacob’s entourage crossed the river called Iabacchus, Jacob remained a little behind, and fought with an “incarnation”, which he defeated and which

“urged him to rejoice in what had happened and not to imagine that he had fought with an insignificant opponent, his defeated being the angel of the Lord. This meant for him a foreshadowing of great luck, for his race would never die out and no mortal would ever surpass his powers” (our translation) (Josephus Flavius 1999, 60).

We want to point out that the tendency of modern translations to interpret the verb “touched” from the structure “And he touched his thigh (וַיִּגַע בְּכַף־יֶרֶקָ – *way-yig-ga’be-kap yerēkōv*) with “hit” (נָגַע – *nāga*) is unjustified, being influenced either by the context or by the nouns נִגְעָה (*neg’a*) and נִגְעוּ (*nig’e*), which means “pain/suffering,” “helplessness” or “wound/injury” (Geller 1982, 52), but the verb נָגַע (*nag’a*) in the Qal conjugation always means “to touch” ^[15], possibly “to barely touch” and only in the Piel conjugation can it mean “to wound,” “to torment” or “to do harm” (Acts 26:11;

Jo 9:19) (Alter 1998, 97). This duality of meaning mirrors the ancient understanding of holiness, the primary attribute of divinity. God is the source of all blessings and the energy of life, but for man, as a created being, closeness to the One who is can be critical (“Man cannot see My face and live”). The ambiguity of *nāga*’ in this passage reflects the dynamics of holiness, since it is no coincidence that this term plays a central role in the ancient strategy of entering into contact with the divinity, since, without a special spiritual preparation, this can be fatal, God being the One who punishes those who disregard His holiness (Uzza, Nadab, Abiud, etc.). In the case of Israel, the duality of holiness forms the basis of a tension that permeates the entire biblical thought. It finds its explanation in both the blessings and the curses of the covenant. The “danger” of being God’s chosen one is also at the basis of the prophetic message: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities!” (Am 3:2) (Geller 1982, 55) ^[16].

Touching Jacob’s hip led to the “dislocation” (וַתִּקַּע – *wattēqa*) of it (יָרַךְ – *yārēk*). The Hiphil root *yāqa*’ highlights a kind of public act of execution committed on living bodies (Nm 25:4; 2 Kgs 21:6.9.13), while the Qal root, present in our text, means “separation/alienation/breaking/dislocation” (Polzin 1969, 233).

Analysing the original Hebrew text, we could notice a difference in the translation into Romanian, compared to the original version (BHS), in the sense that in the Hebrew original the character of the confrontation, the “struggle” between Jacob and God is shown more clearly through the term אֶבֶק, which refers to a hand-to-hand combat sport between two (unarmed) people who try to knock each other to the ground with their arms (Achtemeier 1985, 1147), which denotes the fact that this fight must be understood more as a competition, a contest between man and God, a confrontation in which the aim is not to destroy or injure the opponent, but to train him, to strive to become better and not give in so easily; we are basically talking about a fight that aims to perfect the opponent and at the same time motivate him to win the big prize.

This root “to fight” (אֶבֶק – *abaq*) is found only here, in these two verses of the Bible (Gn 32:24-25) and seems to evoke the name of the river “Jabbok phonetically” (יַבְבֹּק – *yabbōq*) and of Jacob himself (יַעֲקֹב – *ya’ā-qōb*). The toponymy and the events seem phonetically united, so that the river becomes “the place of the heel-catcher’s fight” (Lizorkin-Eysenberg 2019, 56).

Also, the Hebrew term “struggle” (אֶבֶק – *abaq*) and implicitly the denominative verb *bq* “to struggle” in verses 24 and 25 are related to the word “dust,” “dusts”

(אָבֵק – ‘*ā·bêq*) – Dt 28:24; Ez 26:10 – ^[17], perhaps suggesting that hand-to-hand combat involves falling into the “dust” and getting dirty (Hamilton 1995, 329), as two people do when they fight on the ground or try to throw each other to the ground, an aspect that highlights the dynamics of the fight and the rolling in the dust, the dust being what blurred the vision of the One Who wished to remain invisible. Thus, Rabbi David Kimhi (Radak), explaining the term “fight” (אָבֵק – *abaq*), states that it was so intense that a “cloud of dust” (וַיִּתְהַרְרֵם – *way·yê·ā·bêq*) enveloped them while they were fighting (Kimhi 1842, 107). In societies where such contests are unknown, a descriptive phrase should be used, for example, “he and Jacob tried to push each other” (Reyburn and Fry 1997, 763).

Also in this sense, Rabbi Rashi, referring to the fight between the two, states that Menachem (ben Seruk) explains the meaning of the verb “to fight” in the form: *vaye’aveik* (“a man covered himself with dust”), using its connection with the term אָבֵק (*dust*) from which it is derived, which would mean that by their movements they were kicking up dust with their feet. However, Rashi, like Ramban, believes that it means “he clung/clung/attached to it,” being an Aramaic word, as it appears in Sanhedrin 63b [אָבֵקוּ (aviku) – “after it had joined/attached itself”] and in Menahot 42a (“and it was woven together like fringes or loops or more precisely like tassels – Nm 15:38”). Denotes “weaving”, because this is the way in which two people make strong efforts to throw each other to the ground, by one grabbing the other and “weaving” around him with his arms, the rabbis seeing in Jacob’s opponent the guardian angel of Esau (*Genesis Rabbah* 77:3) (Rashi 1999, 325; Ramban 2004, 146).

In rabbinic language, “avikah” is often used to convey the meaning of “chavikah” (*loop*). Similarly, the word *avukah* is so called in rabbinical expression because it is made from small pieces of wood tied and glued together. This is because the letter cheth is difficult to pronounce in Hebrew, and so they used the aleph for more straightforward pronunciation. Thus, it is possible that the term אָבֵקוּ (way·yê·ā·bêq) to be in fact וַיִּתְהַבְּבֵהוּ (way·hab·be·qê·hū), as “and embraced him” (וַיִּתְהַבְּבֵהוּ – way·hab·beq), because perhaps this is the way to exchange between א (aleph) and ח (cheth), in Hebrew (Rashi 1999, 334). Spurrell also suggests that the action verb may be related to the term “embrace” (הַבֵּק – *hābaq*) or it may be a dialectical variant of it, for the sake of wordplay (Spurrell 1906, 282). Hamilton also speaks in this sense, suggesting that there is a connection between the ‘*bq* in this passage and the *hābaq* in Genesis 33:4. Thus, in chapter 32 it appears: a man “struggles” (אָבֵק – ‘*ābaq*) with Jacob (embrace/

clasp in battle), and in chapter 33 Esau “embrace” him (חַבַּק – *ḥābaq*) on Jacob (hug/greeting/form of greeting), the two similar verbs being chosen, in this way, to describe the beginning of Jacob’s meetings (Hamilton 1995, 329).

In turn, Martin-Achard emphasizes that this very rare verb was also chosen for the assonance created between “Jaboc” (יַבֹּק – *yabbōq*) and “Jacob” (יַעֲקֹב – *ya·ā·qōb*) the sounds b/v and k/q forming alliterations pronounced at the beginning of this episode (Martin-Achard 1974, 60), the verb introducing a phonetic play through the name of the river Jabbok (יַבֹּק), similar to Jacob (יַעֲקֹב) and meaning “tumultuous, winding” river (Gunkel 1997, 326), this play on words, thus using the name of the river as an eternal reminder of the most important event that took place there (Ross 1985, 344).

Mark Smith, referring to the verb “to fight,” suggests that it may be another form of *’pq*, which appears in the Hithpael or Dt variant ^[18] and means “to constrain,” “to control oneself/to control oneself” (Gn 43:31; 45:1). Smith emphasizes the use of the root *’pq* in the context of El and Yamm’s plans to attack Baal (Smith 1994, 58-107) and proposes that the niphal of *’bq* in Gn 32:25 could similarly mean “to be caught, detained” (Smith 2002, 640–641; Grabbe 1979, 307-314). Even though Smith’s argument seems quite convincing, it is difficult to explain, in this sense, the use of the preposition “with” (עִם – *im*), which follows the verb in both verses 24 [25] (וַיִּשְׁבַּק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ – *wayyēšbēq* *’iš immo*) and 25(26) (בְּהִאָּבֵקוֹ עִמּוֹ – *bēhēābēqō immô*) (Hamori 2008, 97).

Although the struggle, in general, involves a character of rebellion, hatred, anger, in the present situation this clash with God generates tranquillity and peace in the soul, because it is an assurance of the fact that God is with man in every difficult circumstance of his life and all he has to do is to stay in the fight and hold on tightly to God, so as not to fall and get seriously injured. This clash desired by God with man is another way of telling him that he has the duty to keep Him close to his soul, so as not to get lost in the tumult of this worldly world, which is in free fall, as a result of advanced moral decadence, because this clash is nothing more than a perfection of the technique of remaining in balance, just like in sports, being the art of resisting as long as possible and not unbalancing ourselves from a spiritual point of view. In this sense, God’s clash with man represents a grappling confrontation, each striving to hinder or knock down their “opponent,” or to unbalance them (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary 2003, 1146).

Spiritual transformation in the confrontation at Peniel

In the battle, God wants to show Jacob that it is not He who needs his recognition as God, but he, the man, needs God; from that moment on, he becomes God's “lame,” dependent on God. It is very interesting to note that the battle is a direct answer to Jacob's prayer, because while he was on his way to his brother Esau, with his wives, children and all his wealth, he lost the strength of his faith, his only thought being what his brother would do to him for stealing the blessing of their father, Isaac ^[19]. As a result, God wants to show him, through the battle, that He will offer him His help. Still, at the same time, He had to teach him the last lesson, namely, that of overcoming the human fear inherent in human nature through total faith in Him, who gives courage, tranquillity, and peace to the soul of man.

“Great is the Lord's love for people! Because Jacob was going to meet Esau, God allowed him to wrestle with Jacob in the form of a man, so that he might know through deeds that he would not suffer any harm. All this was done with humility, to drive away the fear from Jacob's soul and to convince him not to be afraid of meeting his brother.” (Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur 1989, 249).

Thus, it is not the fear of death that should terrify man, but the fear of losing God from the soul, when man's thought focuses on other things, which belong strictly to the sphere of immanence. The best prayer comes from a strong inner necessity (MacDonald and Farstad 1997, 57).

On the other hand, analysing Jewish interpretations, we noticed that Jewish scholars speculated that Jacob was not only terrified of his own death, but was also ready to kill in turn. Let us remember the fear of Rebekah, the mother of the two, that if they had met, they would probably have killed each other. In this sense, Rabbi Judah bar Ilai states that aren't fear and terror the same thing? The meaning is, however, that he “feared” that he would be killed; “he was terrified” that he would have to kill. Because Jacob thought: If he submits me, will he not kill me; and if I submit him, will I not kill him? This is the meaning of “he feared” – lest he be killed and “he was terrified” – lest he kill in turn (Sacks 2009, 218).

Self-sufficiency is incompatible with God's work in any age. Faith alone overwhelms the world (Walvoord and Zuck 1983, 180). Jacob knew that God had chosen him over his brother. Still, he forgot to let God direct his own life to fulfil His plan for him. Still, he

wanted to do these deeds in God's place, actions that brought him suffering, by drawing the wrath of his brother, the anger of his father whom he had deceived, the sadness of his mother, because he had gone far from his family, and the weight of his life, as one who had to leave his birthplace, family, friends, to go alone to an unknown region, where he worked as a slave for his uncle for 20 years. However, the alienation from family and country also had a benefit, namely, his closeness to God. In a theophanic scene, the protagonist's isolation from family and others is crucial. Loneliness becomes an absolute necessity for encountering the All, in contrast to the divine appearance amid humanity (Savran 2005, 14).

From that moment on, the All-Powerful did nothing but show him that He would always be close to him, if he believed in Him and at the same time trusted in His plans for him, without trying to rush them, change them, or fulfil them alone. If he had put his trust only in God, he most likely would not have suffered any of the things he had to go through until returning to his homeland. Thus, during that thump, he became aware of his guilt because only the presence of God in a person's life is sufficient to recognize the mistake and produce correction through repentance. That was the moment when God, by touching his hip and dislocating it, showed him His power to lose him in an instant. Still, according to the prophet Ezekiel, “God does not desire the death of the sinner, but that he turn and live” (Ez 33:11). That was the moment when Jacob completely shifted the focus from himself to the Living God, making Him the centre of his existence. For Jacob, it was amazing that his “adversary” could dislocate or numb his hip just by touching it (Gn 32:32) ^[20].

Very often, our life resembles that of Jacob, especially in situations where human worries make us forget the God of heaven and earth. Therefore, solitude offers an intimate setting conducive to the revelatory action in which the God-Man communicates himself perfectly to the human element, which opens its soul like a flower that must shine in the sunlight and share the intoxicating scent of bodily and spiritual purity and cleanliness. In the context of the solitary environment, man can return to himself, to make a rigorous analysis of his conscience and to think of God as the last hope or way of escape. The journey home for Jacob was the cruellest moment because only then did he realize that everything he had and had acquired through hard work throughout his life could be lost in an instant, and that is why, in his despair, he clung to his last bargain, reminding God that He had promised to bring him home safely. That is why it was so crucial for him to receive the blessing from the One with whom he had wrestled,

because the blessing was like a guarantee for him that God would not let him lose. God’s blessing was a guarantee of his life and his family members’ lives because it implies the direct presence of God. Only when he was wrestling with God did he receive the peace he needed in his soul, realizing that the centre of life is not biological life itself but God Himself, the Living Source of eternal life.

“Jacob was aware of the One with whom he was contending, and, believing that His power, though far superior to human power, was limited by His promise to do him good, he determined not to lose the opportunity of securing a blessing. And nothing pleases God more than to see the hearts of His people turned to Him.” (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown 1997, Gn 32:26)

Conclusions

The study highlights the profound significance and complexity of the encounter between Jacob and the mysterious “man” who turns out to be God. In the exegetical analysis of Genesis 32, 24-25, it is confirmed that the struggle, although initiated by the divinity, becomes a means by which Jacob becomes aware of his fragility and dependence on God. This confrontation symbolizes an essential transformation, Jacob moving from a state of self-sufficiency to recognizing his need for the divinity, thus becoming God’s “lame one.”

The struggle is not just a simple physical competition, but a spiritual ritual, in which Jacob shapes his identity and becomes the patriarch of Israel. It also highlights the duality of the divine nature, which, through apparent weakness, fulfils a deeper purpose: that of offering man the opportunity to approach divinity.

This nocturnal encounter is also a metaphor for the challenges of life, where fears and insecurities are confronted through faith. Finally, the study invites readers to reflect on their own spiritual quest, suggesting that true strength and peace come from recognizing dependence on God, correlating biblical experience with contemporary challenges to faith.

Notes

[1] “Ad alot ha-shachar” (until the dawn) means until the darkness of the night has disappeared. Others say that *shachar* (dawn) refers to the image of light appearing in the clouds before sunrise. (Ibn Ezra, 1988, 317).

[2] This means that the fight is an attack, like the attack of a robber or a murderer, and

the victim is defenceless and taken by surprise. Such an assault on one who is helpless and unsuspecting is a deliberate tactic, calculated to make everything easy. This aspect, prominent, is mostly not considered. This is not a fight in which “strength meets strength” and to which the two parties have agreed (Westermann 1985, 516).

[3] The term appears in this text **אֱלֹהִים** (*man*), which is also used in Jo 5:13, where an angel is referred to, and in Dn 9:21, where it relates to the angel Gabriel, described as **אֱלֹהִים** (*man*) par excellence. The reason why these angels are called **אֱלֹהִים** is that they appear to people to whom they speak in human form. The types of angels who speak to man are called **אֱלֹהִים**, because they occur either in a vision or while the person to whom they are shown is fully conscious, awake (Kimhi 1842, 85).

[4] The Hebrew word “ish” has its etymology in the term “enoš” (man, mortal), in the Septuagint, the corresponding one being *άνθρωπος* (*man*). (Comănescu 2009, 33)

[5] Israel rejected submission to the Savior Christ, who appeared in human form, because it did not believe that divinity could take on human form. It did not recognize in this human manifestation the greatness of God incarnate forever. This lack of faith was due to the habit acquired by Israel through the law of Sinai, which had taught them not to submit to man, considering that God could not take human form, because it would be contrary to His greatness. Only at the end of the long night of history, when it will find that it cannot defeat the Man-Christ and when it will understand that humanity can be raised to the level of being the means through which God acts, will Israel receive Christ and ask for His blessing. Until then, it will continue to fight with God, refusing to be defeated by Christ. Stăniloae (n. 300) in (Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, 1992, 180).

[6] His Herculean strength was also highlighted in Gn 29:10, when he rolled the stone from the well’s mouth and watered Laban’s sheep. (Hamilton 1995, 330). In the battle with the All, “which is called faith, God Himself stands by us. God demands, challenges, oppresses, and supports us, in a single saving embrace.” (Pleșu 2003, 241).

[7] He who was expected to be unfair in his struggle with others met an “attacker” himself, who crippled him with a supernatural blow. In other words, like so many of his rivals before him, Jacob encountered a situation that caught him completely unprepared (Ross 1985, 344-5).

[8] The textual structure “touched the joint of his thigh” (**וַיִּגַע בְּכַף יָרְגָוֹ**) – *way.yig.ga’ be-ḵap̄-yerêḵōv*) emphasizes that by this touch God made him understand that, although Esau would not be able to defeat him, the danger would come from another place, in another context, namely one of his own children who would cause him pain. The reference was to his daughter, whom an uncircumcised nation would rape. This is why he wounded the joint of his thigh, the word “thigh” (**כַּף** – *kap̄*) being feminine.

Jacob understood all this from what the angel had done, but he did not understand how this hint applied to his daughter until the incident with Shechem (Gn 34) (Kimhi 1842, 154).

[9] Jacob’s limp is lasting evidence of the reality of the struggle; this is the most lucid of all, a sign that the battle was not a dream. (Kidner 1967, 204).

[10] “Unable” to defeat Jacob by force, the Angel strikes him with a sudden and powerful blow around the hip socket, that is, the acetabulum (the cavity of the iliac bone in which the head of the femur articulates) (Sarna 1989, 227).

[11] Stephen A. Geller shows that “touching the thigh” may mark the end of the race of those born of the patriarch’s seed (Geller 1982, 50; Westermann 1985, 520).

[12] “Therefore, when blessed Abraham sent his faithful servant to Mesopotamia to take a wife for Isaac, he commanded him to swear, saying: ‘Put your hand on my thigh,’ that is, swear by God and by those who will come from me and by the birth of your master. So, the thigh indicates those in the thigh.” (Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei 1992, 181).

[13] The fight between the “man” and Jacob thus becomes a confrontation in which at some point the “man” touches/hits Jacob in the private area, a situation comparable to that mentioned in Dt 25:11-12, which speaks of a fight between two men, a fight in which the wife of the loser demotes the winner by grabbing him by the “private parts” (RSV) (Gervitz 1975, 52-3; Smith 1990, 466-9).

[14] The Rabbis stated in *Bereshit Rabba* 77:4 that God touched all the righteous who were to be born of Jacob, a statement referring to the generation of religious persecution during the time of Hadrian. The purpose of this Midrash is thus to show that the entire event constitutes an indication for future generations, emphasizing that there will be a generation of the seed of Jacob against whom Esau [Rome] will prevail to the point of near eradication or extermination. This happened to the generation of Rabbi Yehudah ben Baba and his companions during the period of the sages of the Mishnah (Ramban 2004, 161).

[15] Westermann, for example, argues that it cannot mean “strike” and refers to “a kind of magical touch.” (Westermann 1985, 517).

[16] The Hebrew word for struck is *nāga’ be*. In many cases it is sufficient to translate it as “touched,” with the first use of *nāga’* in Acts 3:3 being identified with the meaning “to touch,” the other passages suggesting something much more violent than a simple touch. For example, Satan’s claim to “touch” all of Job’s things (Jb 1:11; 2:5) is more than a simple physical touch. Thus, one of the calamities that befell Job’s house was that the wind “struck” (*nāga’ be*) the four corners of his house and destroyed it, making it one with the ground (Jb 1:19). Also, in Jo 9:19 and 1 Kgs 6:9 *nāga’ be* means “to assault, to harm”. The word *nāga’ be* is also used about the idea of a mortal being touched by a supernatural

being (Is 6:7 – “he touched my mouth”; Jer 1:9 – “Yahweh touched my mouth”). Thus, according to Hamilton it is difficult, if not impossible, to decide whether in Acts 32:26 *nāga’ be* would be translated as “struck” or “touched” (Hamilton 1995, 331).

[17] The Hebrew word for battle is a play on the name of the river, which will forever serve as a reminder. The Hebrew word for “battle” is found only here and in verse 25 and nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. The word itself comes from the root “abaq,” which means “dust.” The basic meaning of this word, used in the context of battle, refers to the idea of “being dusted during battle.” In total, there are three similar words in Hebrew: Jacob, Jabbok, and “fought” (*yaaveik*) (Fruchtenbaum 2008, 482; Ibn Ezra 1988, 317). Since the word אֲבָק (abaq) – dust – is part of the same word family, probably the action verb also contains the meaning of “to dust oneself”, taking a dump. (Ross 1985, 344).

[18] Acadiana has two separate stems, a Dt (a doubled second radical with a – t – infix) and a form with a – tan – infix. Dt resembles Hitpael in that it includes a t-prefix with a doubled second radical and usually has a passive and rarely a reflexive (Huehnergard 2005, 424).

[19] “Clearly, all he cared about was Esau’s reaction, which is why he develops an entire strategy of self-defense and resorts to prayer. Now, in this prayer, Jacob calls himself et-ab-dekh, the servant of YHWH (from ebed – servant, servant). ...God, however, apparently did not want Jacob to be a servant. That is why he triggers the extraordinary episode called Jacob’s Struggle with the Angel.” (Comănescu 2009, 33).

[20] God limited His power so that He would not prevail against Jacob, and only in this way could Jacob stand. Then came the action: He touched the hip socket. The word “touched” means that He struck the hip. It was not a mere touch but a real blow; it was a supernatural touch like that of Is 6:7, and its result was the dislocation of the hip (Fruchtenbaum 2008, 483).

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