

Yaakov blesses his grandchildren.

הַמַּלְאָךְ הַגָּאֵל אֹתִי מִכָּל-רָע יְבָרֶךְ אֶת-הַנְּעָרִים וַיִּקְרָא בְהֵם שְׁמֵי וְשֵׁם אֲבוֹתָי אַבְרָהָם וַיִּצְחָק וַיִּדְגּוּ לְרַב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ:

“The Messenger who has redeemed me from all evil, may it bless these youths and may it call in them my name, and the name of my fathers, Avraham and Yitzchok, and may they grow great in midst of the Land.” (Bereishis 48:16).

After Shema this is the most famous pasuk in the Torah. It is said as a prayer at bedtime and taught to children from the day before their *bris*. On the face, it sounds like Yaakov, and all those who use it as a prayer, are praying to an angel – divine messenger – as opposed to Hashem. If so, that would be contrary to the most famous pasuk in the Torah – Hashem is One. Who was this Messenger? Why was Yaakov asking that He call these children by his and his forefathers’ names? What is the message that they grow great, specifically in the Land? Why is this prayer mentioned to children for all of exile?

Yaakov gave this blessing on his deathbed. This is the *bechor* blessing. Yaakov was passing along the birthrights – leadership, monarchy, kingship – to Ephraim and to Menashe. Previously, Avraham gave it to Yitzchok who gave it to him. He first promoted his grandchildren into their own tribes. (Ibid 48:5). He did this in the presence of Yoseph, even before knowing that they were present. (48:8). Prior to giving the bracha, Yaakov has a preamble. “Kel Shakkai, (Hashem), who appeared to me at Luz.” (Ibid 48:3). This is significant because Hashem appeared to Yaakov at Luz twice. Once when he left his father’s house and was promised protection, a multitude of offspring, and the Land of Canaan (ibid 28:15) and when he returned to Canaan and was called Yisroel (ibid 35:10). Luz is Bethel (ibid 28:19 and 35:6) and Bethel is in Ephraim’s territory. (Shoftim 4:5).

The first time Yaakov was in Luz, Hashem said, “the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring.” (Bereishis 28:13). This land, specifically, that Yaakov was lying on, was important. His descendants will be like the dust of the earth and spread out, from there. (Ibid 28:14). And like He said to Avraham, **וַיְבָרֶכְךָ בְּכָל-מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָדָמָה וַיְבָרֶכְךָ** “and all the families of the world and their children will be blessed through you.” (Ibid). To connect the promises, Yaakov returned to Luz and Hashem promised him, “Be fertile and multiply. A nation and an assembly of nations will be from you and kings shall issue from your loins.” (Ibid 35:11). It was clear to Yaakov, that his children will each become nations and one would rule over them. The kingdom will be from the land of Luz – the location of the promises.

Yaakov blessed his grandchildren, Ephraim and Menashe, because the kings would come from Yoseph and rule in Luz / Bethel. Yoseph objects saying that Yaakov is putting Ephraim first, using his right hand. (Ibid 48:18). However, Yoseph didn’t

realize he also put Ephraim first – taking him first to be placed before Yaakov. (Ibid 48:13). They both knew the kingship would come through Ephraim, and Menashe would support the monarchy.

Yaakov is now ready to pass along the authority to govern. He recalls how Hashem promised He would make Yaakov great and give the Land as an *everlasting possession* to his descendants. (Ibid 48:4). Yaakov then proceeds to make Ephraim and Menashe shevatim. (Ibid 48:5). Yaakov could not see (ibid 48:10) but he still “saw” Yoseph’s sons. (Ibid 48:8). He was able to see clearly the path from himself to them in the birthrights to sovereignty and authority in the Land.

Interestingly, the pasuk of the bracha commences וַיְבָרֶךְ אֶת-יוֹסֵף “And he blessed Yoseph.” (Ibid 48:15). The blessing is clearly referencing the children. (Ibid 48:16). He was not blessing Yoseph the individual. He was passing his blessing of the *bechora* to Yoseph and then on to Yoseph’s children. He did not even want to wait for Yoseph to do it. He passed it on to both generations, funneling it directly into Ephraim.

“The Messenger who redeemed me.” Yaakov was not referring to Hashem here. He was referring to the Promise that was given to his forefathers and to him; the Promise he just passed along through Yoseph to Ephraim. He just previously referred to Hashem as his shepherd. (Ibid 48:15). He calls the promise a messenger because it was the go-between of blessing between Hashem and Yaakov. Hashem sent this messenger to all three, Avraham, Yitchok, and Yaakov. Now it was Yaakov himself that would pass it along. He was passing along the Promise: you will be great and multiply and you will rule this Land. It was this promise / messenger that redeemed Yaakov from all evils to beset him like his brother’s revenge, Lavan, the assassin on the road, the people of Shechem, all his neighbors, and the famine. This is what is written in the Pesach Haggadah, לְשִׁמְרָתוֹ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל “Blessed in the Guardian of His Promise to Yisroel.” The promise of ultimate redemption and rule in Canaan for an everlasting possession. This is why this prayer is mentioned in *galus* at nighttime from bris-time. It is not a prayer to a malakh or angel. It is referencing hope in the fulfillment of the Promise Hashem gave the forefathers that the ultimate redemption will come!

“May He bless these youths...” Yaakov refers to Hashem, the Giver of the Promise. May the Promise go into them. May they be called Israel and the nation of Avraham and Yitzhok – implying that they are the rightful leaders.

“And may they multiply greatly amidst the Land.” May they fill the Land with their progeny but also rule it in prosperity, wealth, abundance, and safety, for all time.

This was the original way things were to be and may be in the future. However, along the line, Binyamin and Yehuda gained the rights to the monarchy and the Mikdash.