

Parasha Vayeitzei

- Genesis 28:10-32:3
- Hosea 11:7-14:10
- John 1:19-51

The Torah Portion at a Glance

Jacob leaves his hometown Be'er Sheva and journeys to Charan. On the way, he encounters "the place" and sleeps there, dreaming of a ladder connecting heaven and earth, with angels climbing and descending on it; YHWH appears and promises that the land upon which he lies will be given to his descendants. In the morning, Jacob raises the stone on which he laid his head as an altar and monument, pledging that it will be made the house of Elohim.

In Charan, Jacob stays with and works for his uncle Laban, tending Laban's sheep. Laban agrees to give him his younger daughter Rachel -- whom Jacob loves -- in marriage, in return for seven years' labor. But on the wedding night, Laban gives him his elder daughter, Leah, instead -- a deception Jacob discovers only in the morning. Jacob marries Rachel, too, after agreeing to work another seven years for Laban.

Leah gives birth to six sons -- Reuben, Shimon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun -- and a daughter, Dinah, while Rachel remains barren. Rachel gives Jacob her handmaid, Bilhah, as a wife to bear children in her stead, and two more sons, Dan and Naphtali, are born. Leah does the same with her handmaid, Zilpah, who gives birth to Gad and Asher. Finally, Rachel's prayers are answered and she gives birth to Joseph.

Jacob has now been in Charan for fourteen years and wishes to return home, but Laban persuades him to remain, now offering him sheep in return for his labor. Jacob prospers, despite Laban's repeated attempts to swindle him. After six years, Jacob leaves Charan in stealth, fearing that Laban would prevent him from leaving with the family and property for which he labored. Laban pursues Jacob, but is warned by YHWH in a dream not to harm him. Laban and Jacob make a pact on Mount Gal-Ed, attested to by a pile of stones, and Jacob proceeds to the Holy Land, where he is met by angels.

(adapted from chabad.org)



The Messiah in the Torah Portion

The Messiah speaks of our current Torah portion in John 1:19-51. Here, Y'shua clarifies that Jacob's vision of a ladder was actually a vision of Messiah Himself. What does such a revelation mean?

Ya'acov / Jacob saw the vision of the ladder when he rested his head upon a stone. The Hebrew word in this passage for stone is "eben," spelled with the ancient letters aleph-bet-nun sofeet. This term for stone contains the Hebrew word for son – "ben." This word is spelled bet-nun sofeet. From the word play, we can see that when Ya'acov rested in the Son's stone, he was able to experience the presence of Y'shua in a profound way. It was an awesome manifestation!

Ya'acov's ladder was more than just a dream. It is an actual portal to heaven. It is the place where angels ascend and descend to earth. Jacob's ladder – the person of Y'shua of Nazareth – is the gate to Father YHWH (Genesis 28:13). A ladder is like a bridge that grants access to something higher. This is the perfect representation of Y'shua. We are told in Philippians 2:5 to "put on the mind of Christ / Messiah." We are also told in Isaiah 55 that "His thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways His ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than your ways, and His thoughts than your thoughts." As we climb Jacob's ladder our life, our mind, our heart, and our will changes. Our thinking is elevated and each rung takes us closer to being like Him.

A ladder involves effort. Y'shua is not an escalator that briskly pushes us higher. We must make the effort to move forward with Him. This effort is to first be made in "Tehillim" or prayer. The sages of Judaism have recognized Ya'acov's ladder as the power of prayer. The Hebrew word for ladder is "sulam." The numerical value of its letters is 136. The word "kol" has the same numerical value. "Kol" is Hebrew for voice, as in the voice of prayer. When we pray and seek YHWH's face we can come into His presence and transcend the cares of this world. Our worries and concerns change when we begin to see things from His perspective. From the height of a tall ladder everything below seems so much smaller. Through Tehillim we become one with YHWH's thoughts we see the "bigger picture." Our huge problems are actually very small from the height of YHWH's glory. This exact place is named "Bethel" or "Beit-El" in Hebrew. "Beit-El" means "house of El." It is understood that this exact spot was the mount that Abraham offered Isaac and the Temple Mount would later stand.

After his dream, Ya'acov does something very strange. "Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it," Genesis 28:18. This was the very first anointing in the Torah and a prophetic event that would culminate with Messiah. Jacob's anointing of a stone is foretelling of the Anointed Messiah. When YHWH later speaks to Jacob He introduces himself by reminding him of this deed. "I am the Elohim of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land," Genesis 31:13. The Hebrew word for "anointed" in this passage is "mashach." This word is the exact Hebrew root of the phrase "Moshiach" or "Messiah." Y'shua is the Anointed One of YHWH. "And we know how YHWH anointed Y'shua of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because YHWH was with him." Jacob rested in Moshiach, had a vision of Moshiach, and then worshipped Moshiach all in this week's Torah portion.

Applying the Portion to Life Today

We read in this week's Torah portion about the birth and naming of Ya'acov's twelve sons. Each name tells part of the parasha, each child's designation speaks of his place in the family.

In Biblical times, as it should be today, names carry great significance and importance. Naming a child was something done with much thought and consideration because they are reflective upon a person's behavior and character. Just think about what comes to mind when you hear the name "Michael Jackson" and you will get the point. "The ancient Israelites believed that names had mystical powers and that in many ways they reflected the character of a person," says one source. Unfortunately though, if you pick up your King James Version or NIV and read through the scriptures the English names you find aren't really the correct names of the individuals. What you do find are poor substitutes and charades. The words and names found in your Bible were not the words and names used thousands of years ago.

You see, the Bible was originally written in Hebrew. When Hebrew is changed or translated into any other language MUCH is lost in the process. No other language can adequately convey the message and inspiration of the set apart Hebrew tongue. Even English in all of its grandeur is a poor alternate for Hebrew. That is why it is so important to learn to pray, read, and talk in Hebrew. It is a great mitzvah/commandment to use the holy language in study and worship. The restoration of the Hebrew language and the abandonment of gentile dialects are just part of the restoration of all things as spoken of in Acts 3 and Zephani'yah 3:9, "For then will I return to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of YHWH, to serve him with one consent."

Did you know that Joshua was never called Joshua? And Moses was never called Moses. While the Hebrew words of the Scriptures were translated into (poor) English "equivalents" the original names of the Biblical characters were transliterated or changed to something similar. The Hebrew family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob never heard the English names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This name changing that has taken place removes the Israelite identity of the people and creates a story of English speaking people with English sounding names. When the name of a person is changed so is their character and what you think about a person. For example the Hebrew parents of the Messiah were not the very English couple of Mary and Joseph. Their names were very Hebrew - Yoseph and Miriam.

Converts to Judaism have for centuries adopted a Hebrew name that is usually used at religious activities and services, but can be employed all the time. Many congregations hold "Naming celebrations" where the Hebrew name is announced to the public. It is certainly not a bad idea to adopt and use a Hebrew name. Nor is it a bad idea to name your child with the holy tongue. A Biblical custom has arisen of not using the child's name until it is formally announced to the community at brit milah (circumcision) or a naming service. The Rabbi or the father usually makes this announcement with the words "let him/her be known in the house of Israel as _____."

The Messiah himself set the example for believers "on the eighth day when it was time for his brit milah, he was given the name Yahshua, which is what the angel had called him before his conception," Luke 2:21.

Yochannan the Immerser, aka John the Baptist, was not named after his father as was one custom. Instead he was named at the time of brit milah the name an angel had given him. This is yet another example for believers to follow.

The purpose of donning, having, and using a Hebrew name is profound for many reasons. One of which is that a Hebrew name is reflective upon the Hebrew characteristics and lifestyle of a person. Another aspect of this is that as others speak your Hebrew name they are calling forth the true meaning and worth of your new self. Choosing a Hebrew name is a great action to take after a person comes to a revelation or unveiling of who they really are as an Israelite. Many people in the Bible had their names changed by YHWH after their character was changed by an encounter with YHWH. For example Avram became Avraham and Ya'acov became Isra'el.

Who have you become? Are you the same person you used to be?

Has your encounter with the emet, the truth of your Israelite culture and identity made a huge change in you? Could a Hebrew name reflect this change to those around you? Pray about adopting a Hebrew name. Yes, it is a little weird. But, think about the profound meanings of a Hebrew name. Wouldn't a name change just be the next step towards your intimacy with YHWH and other Israelites? Wouldn't your new name tell more of the your restoration in the family of Israel?

The twelve sons of Ya'acov were named according to their place in the family. Now follow the birth order and understand the struggles of this parasha through the power of the Hebrew names:

- Re'uven - see, a son (named this as a reminder of the firstborn son, a sight to see)
- Shimon – hearing (named this because YHWH heard the prayer for another son)
- Levi – joining (named because Le'ah thought this child would join her and Ya'acov)
- Y'hudah – praise (named this as the family praised YHWH for another boy)
- Dan – he judged (named this as YHWH judged in Rachel's favor and gave her a child)
- Naftali- my wrestling (named this as a symbol of the wrestling between Rachel and Le'ah for Ya'acov's favor and love)
- Gad – good fortune (named this as a testimony to good fortune found by Zilpah, Le'ah's slavegirl)
- Asher – happy (named this because this child would bring much happiness to Le'ah)
- Yissakhar – hire, reward (named this as a testimony to YHWH that he rewarded Le'ah for giving her slave-girl to Ya'acov to have relations with)
- Z'vulun – living together (named this as hope that this son would cause Le'ah and Ya'acov to live together)
- Yoseph- may he add (named this as a prayer to YHWH that another son would be added to Rachel and Ya'acov)
- Bin'yamin – son of the right-hand (named this by Ya'acov at the death of Rachel)

Portion Points to Ponder

1. The Hebrew name for this portion is "Vayeitzei." What does this mean?
2. Read Hosea 11:7-14:10. How does this relate to the story of Genesis this week?
3. Consider the words found in John 1:19-51. What did you learn from studying this passage?
4. How is Messiah Y'shua pictured in this Torah portion?
5. What happened when Jacob/Ya'acov slept upon a stone pillow? Does YHWH still speak to people through their dreams?
6. Ya'acov dreamed of a ladder bridging heaven and earth. Who / what is this ladder?
7. The Torah says that the angels on the ladder were "ascending and descending." How is this order important?
8. On what land did Jacob's dream occur? What is special about this exact place?
9. When Jacob awoke he declared the presence of YHWH. Do you remember a time when you awoke from spiritual slumber and spoke the praise of Elohim?
10. Genesis 32:10 states that Jacob took nothing with him when left the land of Canaan. If this is true, then where did the anointing oil come from that Jacob used upon the stone?
11. The name of the city Luz was changed by Ya'acov to what?
12. In Beresheet / Genesis 29 Jacob sees his future wife at a well. Ya'acov moved a stone to open the well so Rachel could water the sheep. How is this account similar to Rebekah's actions at a well?
13. Ya'acov revealed himself as kin to Rachel. How did the people rejoice? Who did Jacob live with and work for?
14. "Ya'acov served seven years for Rachel, but they seemed as only a few days." What is the number 7 symbolic of? How does this passage from Genesis relate to 2 Peter 3:8, "a day with YHWH is as a thousand years"?
15. A great wedding feast was held to celebrate Ya'acov taking a wife. How did he marry the wrong woman?
16. Laban said that his country's custom was not to wed the younger daughter before the firstborn. How is this birth order / birth right reminiscent of Isaac's blessings to Jacob and Esav?
17. Ya'acov worked 7 more years for Rachel. Now, Ya'acov had two wives and two hand maidens. Genesis 29:30 states that Ya'acov loved his second wife Rachel more than Leah. Where in the Bible is such prohibited?
18. Leah conceived and gives birth to Reuven. What is the meaning of his name?
19. Leah again gives birth and names her second son Simeon. What comes of him and his descendants later in the Bible?
20. Leah's third son was named "Levi" or "Lewi." How is this name prophetic to the ministry of the tribe of Levi?
21. Leah's fourth son is named Judah or "Yah'udah" in Hebrew. Why is this name appropriate?

22. Genesis 30 starts with Rachel being angry that she had not become a mother. Ya'acov response shows that "children are a gift YHWH, the fruit of the womb is a reward," Psalm 127:3. What comes of Rachel's envy?
23. Bihlah gives birth to a son named what? Genesis 49:17 says what exactly about this tribe?
24. With great strife Bilhah wrestled to have a son named Naphtali? Was Bilhah Jacob's wife?
25. Leah took Zilpah, her hand maiden, and gave her to Ya'acov "to be his wife." How many wives did Jacob have? Was this a good thing?
26. Zilpah gives birth to whom?
27. What were the "love apples" spoken of in Genesis 29?
28. Leah gives birth to 2 more children. How do their names speak of her relationship with her husband?
29. Rachel delivers a son named Joseph after YHWH hears her prayers. Explain how the power of prayer is once again revealed in the book of Genesis.
30. Ya'acov wants to leave Laban and go to his own land. Laban doesn't want him to leave. What comes of the agreement for Ya'acov to only take the speckled sheep?
31. Did Jacob deceive Laban concerning the farm animals?
32. When Ya'acov listened to the voice of YHWH to leave Laban, he did so with a greater herd and more blessings. How is this similar to when the Hebrew people plundered Egypt or when Abraham left the land of Avimelech?
33. Laban catches up with Ya'acov after he tried to flee. Laban isn't happy his children and grandchildren are leaving. Nor is he pleased that someone has taken his idols. Why would Rachel steal and hide Laban's gods?
34. Does Jacob's statement in Genesis 31:32 come true?
35. How long did Ya'acov work for Laban? Was Laban a fair employer? Was Jacob a good employee?
36. Laban and Ya'acov used a pillar to signify their agreement to be kind to one another. What exactly did such a promise ensue?
37. Laban begins his journey towards the Promised Land and is met by whom?

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