



Shabbat Table Talk Page

Overview

- **Parashah: Vayetzei (ויצא, "and he went out")**
- **Chapters: Gen. 28:10-32:3**



ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו, וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה

– Torah Study Blessing –

Synopsis

Last week’s Torah portion (Toldot) told how Jacob had successfully supplanted his twin brother Esau by obtaining the blessing as the heir of the chosen family. However, since Esau had threatened to annul the decree by means of murder, if necessary, his mother Rebekah arranged for Jacob to flee for Haran to stay with her brother Laban until things cooled off...

While Jacob was on the way to Haran, he came to a “certain place” and camped there for the night. Using a stone for a pillow, he dreamed of a ladder that was set on the earth that reached to the heavens, with the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. Then the LORD Himself (YHVH) stood above the ladder and promised Jacob that his offspring would be like the dust of the earth, and that through Him all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

When he awoke from this dream, Jacob was awestruck and called the place “the house of God” and the “Gate of Heaven.” The following morning, he took the stone he used as a pillow, anointed it with oil, and consecrated the place as Bet ‘El (Bethel). Then he made a vow that if the LORD would be with him, providing for his needs until he returned home to Beersheva, he would tithe to God one-tenth of all of his possessions and would return to worship and pray at the altar he had just consecrated.

When he finally reached Haran, Jacob encountered some shepherds who were gathering their sheep at the local well. After enquiring about the welfare of his uncle Laban, he saw his cousin Rachel bringing her father’s flock to the well. Jacob immediately rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, watered her flock, and kissed her. He told her that he was her cousin, her father’s sister’s son Jacob, who had come from the land of Canaan. Rachel then ran home and told her father Laban, who invited him to stay with him.

Jacob had immediately fallen in love with his cousin Rachel and eagerly agreed to work as Laban’s shepherd for seven years in order to marry her. After the seven years elapsed, however, Laban “supplanted” Jacob’s desire by swapping his eldest daughter Leah for Rachel on the very wedding night -- a deception Jacob later discovered the next morning. After protesting to Laban, Jacob was allowed to marry Rachel a week later – provided that he agreed to work for seven more years as Laban’s shepherd.



After this the Torah begins recounting the the birth of the twelve sons of Jacob (i.e., the twelve tribes of Israel). When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved by Jacob, he “opened her womb” while her sister Rachel remained childless. Leah gave birth to Jacob’s first four sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah. When Rachel realized that she was barren, she followed her great grandmother Sarah’s example and offered her handmaiden, Bilhah, to be a surrogate wife. Bilhah then bore Jacob’s next two sons: Dan and Naphtali.

In the competitive madness of this maternal rivalry, Leah thought she had stopped being able to bear children, so she gave her handmaiden, Zilpah, to Jacob as a surrogate wife. Zilpah then bore two sons: Gad and Asher. However, Leah was not finished with her childbearing after all, and gave birth to two more sons, Issachar and Zebulon.

Finally the LORD remembered Rachel’s prayers and she gave birth to a son, Joseph (she also gave birth to Benjamin, but that account is given in *next week’s* Torah portion).

Now after Joseph was born, Jacob wanted to return to Beersheva to see his parents and to settle back in the Promised Land. However Laban persuaded him to remain, offering him sheep in exchange for his labor. Despite his father in law’s repeated attempts to cheat him, Jacob nevertheless prospered, since God was with him. After six more years of service, Jacob received a vision from the LORD telling him it was time to return to the land promised to his descendants. After discussing the matter with Rachel and Leah, Jacob decided to flee from the clutches of Laban while he was away shearing sheep, since by this point it was apparent that his father-in-law never would let him leave in peace.

Just before the flight from Haran, Rachel stole her father’s idols, perhaps intending to cause him bad luck. Three days later, Laban discovered that Jacob had fled. He gathered his men and pursued him, finally catching up to him seven days later at the mountains of Gilad. However, the LORD appeared to him in a dream and warned him not to try to influence Jacob to return to Haran. Laban then rebuked his son-in-law for having left by stealth and accused him of stealing his idols. Jacob denied the accusation and (unwittingly) proclaimed that the real thief would die (a prophecy that was later to be fulfilled with the premature death of Rachel). After searching through Jacob’s possessions (which proved fruitless since Rachel had carefully hidden the idols), Jacob was able to finally give his evil father in law a piece of his mind: “These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night.”

Laban and Jacob then parted after making a “peace treaty” attested to by a pile of stones. Laban (who was from Paddan-aram, or Syria) called the pile of stones “Yegar-sahadutha” (Aramaic) but Jacob called it Gal-Ed (Hebrew for “heap of witness”).

Jacob then made his way back to the land of Canaan, where angels from God met him. When he saw the angels, he exclaimed, “This is God’s camp!” and called the name of the place *Machanayim* (“two camps”). The portion ends with Jacob sending messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Edom, explaining that he was returning to his homeland after his long sojourn in Haran.



Parashah Questions

1. What does *vayetzei* (וַיֵּצֵא) mean? (Gen. 28:10) ¹
2. What was so special about Beersheba (בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע)? ²
3. Why did Jacob (Yaakov) *flee* Beersheba? ³
4. On the way to Haran, Jacob stopped “at *the place*” (בְּמָקוֹם). What happened there? (28:11-19) ⁴
5. When Jacob awoke from the dream, what did he say? ⁵
6. Where does Jewish tradition say “the place” was? ⁶
7. What did Jacob do the morning following his dream? ⁷
8. Compare Gen. 28:1-5 with Gen. 28:11-19. *When* did Jacob flee to Laban’s house? ⁸
9. Where did Jacob meet Rachel, and what did he do there? (Gen. 29:1-12) ⁹
10. Laban was Jacob’s uncle, the brother of his mother Rebekah. He had two daughters. What were their names? What was Laban’s wife’s name? ¹⁰



¹ The word *vayetzei* means “and he went out,” from the verb *yatza* (יָצָא), to go out. The Exodus from Egypt is called *yetziat mitzrayim*, from the same Hebrew verb.

² Beersheba (“well of oath” or “well of seven”) was a sacred shrine: “Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of YHVH, the Everlasting God” Gen (21:33). Various theophanies occurred there, first to Hagar (21:17), then to Isaac (26:24), to Jacob (46:2), and to Elijah (1 Kings 19:5). Amos later identified it (along with Bethel and Gilgal) as one of the “rival shrines” to Temple worship in Jerusalem.

³ Jacob fled from the wrath of his twin brother Esau to go to the land of Haran, in Aram (Syria), where his mother’s family had settled from the days of Nachor, Abraham’s brother.

⁴ Jacob had a dream (חֲלוֹם) of a ladder (סֻלָּם) to heaven with angels going up and down on it. The LORD stood above it and extended the Abrahamic oath of blessing to him.

⁵ Jacob was filled with awe and called the place “the house of God” and the “Gate of Heaven.”

⁶ “The place” was supposedly Mt Moriah, based on Abraham’s revelation of “the place” (הַמָּקוֹם) of the sacrifice of Isaac as described in Gen. 22:4. However, the mountains of Bet El are north of Jerusalem, and indeed later Bet El became the location of a competing shrine for the Northern Kingdom (as opposed to the Temple in Jerusalem).

⁷ He made a monument from the rock he used for a pillow, poured oil upon it, made a vow, and named the place Bethel (בֵּית-אֵל), “the house of God.” Originally the place was named “Luz” (לֹז), “almond tree.”

⁸ Jewish tradition states that before he went to Laban’s house, Jacob spent 14 years studying Torah with Shem (and Eber) in Jerusalem. This was to prepare him for marriage or to instruct him in Torah....

⁹ Jacob met Rachel at the village well near Haran; he lifted the rock that topped the well, watered her flock, and then kissed her, saying that he was her “long lost” cousin. (What do you think young Rachel felt about this?)

¹⁰ Laban’s two daughters were named *Leah* (לֵאָה) and *Rachel* (רָחֵל), Leah being the older of the two. We do not know the name of Laban’s wife. Beginning with Cain’s and Abel’s sisters, many women of the Bible were left unnamed: Noah’s wife; Abraham’s mother; Lot’s wife; Potiphar’s wife; Pharaoh’s daughter, David’s mother.



11. Whom did Jacob marry first, and why? ¹¹
12. Why didn't Leah reveal her identity to Jacob during the wedding ceremony - or during their time afterward on their first marital night? (29:23) ¹²
13. When Jacob found out about the deception and expressed outrage for her part in the duplicity, what did Leah say in her defense? ¹³
14. What does the name *Leah* (לֵאָה) mean? ¹⁴
15. Why were Leah's eyes described as "weak"? (29:17) ¹⁵
16. What was the name of Leah's servant? (29:24) ¹⁶
17. What excuse did Laban give for his deception? (29:26) ¹⁷
18. How long did Jacob work for Laban in order to marry Rachel and Leah? (29:27) ¹⁸
19. What does the name *Rachel* (רַחֵל) mean? ¹⁹
20. What was the name of Rachel's servant? (29:29) ²⁰
21. Did Jacob really *hate* Leah? (29:30-31) ²¹



¹¹ Leah, because Laban tricked Jacob. Because of this, the custom of *bedeken ha-kallah* (veiling the bride) includes a ritual where the groom (*chatan*) lowers the veil to make sure his bride is there! This is called "Bedeken."

¹² Rachel and Leah made a secret agreement not to expose Laban's ruse to spare Leah shame.

¹³ When Jacob "despised" Leah for her complicity, she argued that Jacob had no reason to complain, since he deceived his own father in order to obtain the blessing of the birthright.

¹⁴ Leah means "weary," from the root *la'ah* (לָאָה) meaning to be grieved or offended. The root first appears in Gen. 19:11 where the blinded Sodomites "wearietd themselves" groping for the door to Lot's house.

¹⁵ The Hebrew word *rakkot* (רַכּוֹת) means "tender" or "delicate," which perhaps is connected to her name "Leah" (which means weary from weakness or delicacy). The midrash states that when Rebekah bore twins, Esau (the eldest) was promised to her brother's eldest (Leah), and Jacob was promised to Rachel. Leah's eyes were puffy and red from her constant crying over the prospect of marrying Esau.

¹⁶ Zilpah (זִלְפָּה), who later became a surrogate mother for Leah and bore for her two sons: Gad and Asher. Zilpah's name means a "trickle," as from myrrh.

¹⁷ He claimed there was a "tradition" of marrying the eldest first – perhaps a corollary of the idea of the right of the firstborn which Jacob had usurped from Esau.

¹⁸ Jacob worked seven years for each wife.

¹⁹ Rachel means "ewe," or a female sheep. She was the more beautiful of the two sisters, being described as *yafat to'ar vifat mareh* (יִפְתַּת־תְּאֵר וַיְפַת־מַרְאֵה), "beautiful of form and appearance."

²⁰ Bilhah (בִּלְהָה), who later became a surrogate mother for Rachel and bore for her two sons: Dan and Naphtali (Rachel and Sarah shared the problem of barrenness). After the death of Leah, Reuben both dishonored his father and defiled Bilhah by sleeping with her (35:22). Bilhah's name apparently means "troubled" or "bashful."

²¹ The preceding verse (29:31) stated that Jacob *loved* Rachel more than (he loved) Leah, and therefore Jacob also loved Leah. Because he did not love her as much as he loved Rachel, however, Leah regarded it as if she were entirely unloved and hated by him...



22. Why did Leah call her first son *Reu-ven* (רְאוּבֵן), “behold a son”? (29:32) ²²
23. Why did Leah name her fourth son *Judah*? (29:35) ²³
24. How many children did Leah have before Rachel decided to give her handmaid to Jacob as a concubine? (Gen. 30:1-4) ²⁴
25. List the names of the first four sons born to Jacob. ²⁵
26. Why did Reuben give his mother mandrakes? (30:14) ²⁶
27. Can you name all twelve sons (i.e., *shevatim* / tribes) of Jacob in the order of their birth, along with their respective mothers? ²⁷
28. How many children did Leah bear in total? ²⁸
29. Briefly describe the *character* of Laban’s two daughters and the emotional cost of their rivalry upon Israel’s family... ²⁹
30. What happened after Joseph was born? (30:24-25) ³⁰
31. How many years total did Jacob work for Laban? (Gen. 31:38-41) ³¹



²² Reuben’s name (רְאוּבֵן) was a “play on words” meaning “Look, a son!” Leah named him such because she said the LORD *looked* (רָאָה) upon her affliction as being the unloved wife. Note that the power to name a baby was generally given to the mother (unless her name was overruled by the father, as in the case of Benjamin).

²³ All four of the women understood Jacob would have 12 sons, with each bearing three. Leah called him Judah (יְהוּדָה) in praise for exceeding the expected quota of children she would bear.

²⁴ Leah had given birth to four sons before Rachel decided to co-opt Bilhah as her surrogate.

²⁵ 1) Rueben; 2) Simeon; 3) Levi; and 4) Judah. All of these were children from Leah.

²⁶ Mandrakes were plants (of the nightshade family) that were sought out for use in creating a “love potion” (i.e., aphrodisiac) or as an ancient fertility treatment. Note that when Rachel asked for some of Leah’s mandrakes, Leah was indignant: “Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband, and now you want to take away my son’s mandrakes also?”

²⁷ In order of birth (by each mother):
Leah: Rueben (“see”), Simeon (“hear”), Levi (“joined”), Judah (“praised”);
Bilhah: Dan (“judge”); Naphtali (“wrestling”);
Zilpah: Gad (“troop”); Asher (“happy”);
Leah: Issachar (“there will be recompense”); Zebulun (“honored”); and finally:
Rachel: Joseph (“may he add”); Benjamin (“son of the right hand”).

²⁸ Leah had six children to the two children of each of the concubines and to Rachel. The Leah/Zilpah pair yielded a total of 8 sons to the 4 from Rachel/Bilhah.

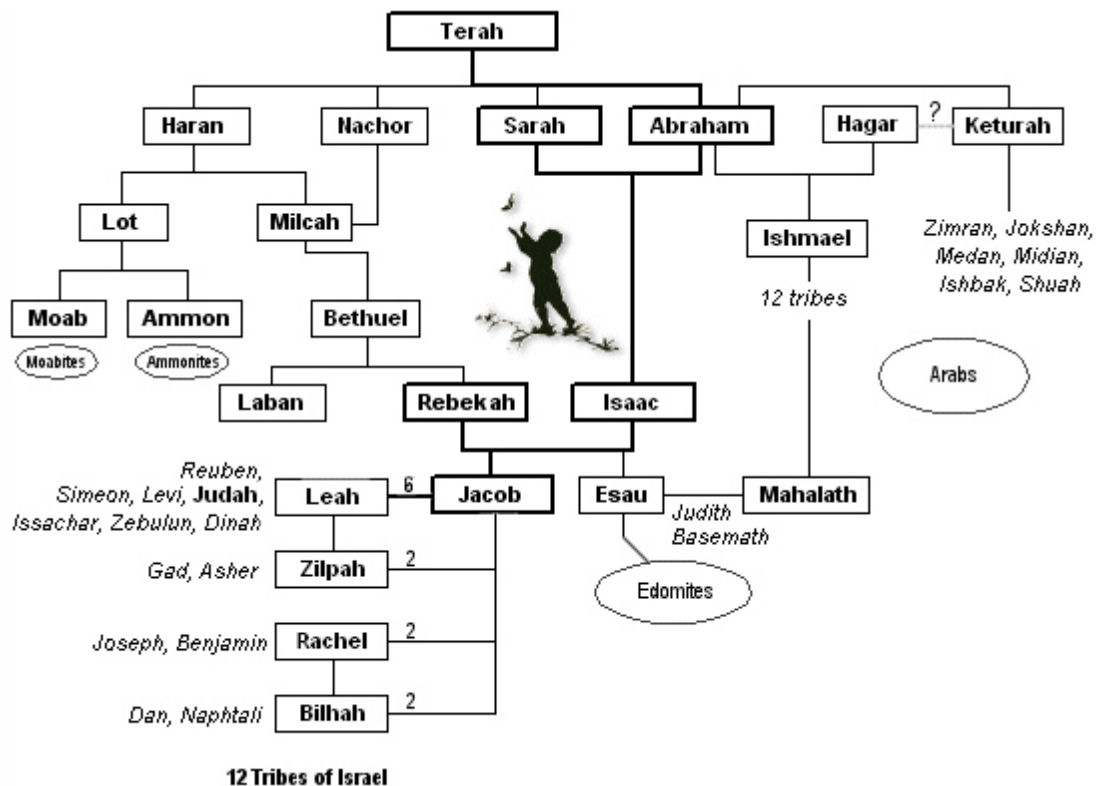
²⁹ This is a discussion question. For instance, do you see how the qualities of evil Laban were passed on to his daughters? What about Rachel’s attachment to her father’s idols (31:34), etc.?

³⁰ Jacob knew (by revelation) that it was time to return to the Promised Land.

³¹ Jacob worked for Laban for 20 years.



- 32. Why is Laban regarded as the first great enemy of the Jewish people? ³²
- 33. What did God say to Laban in a dream? (31:24) ³³
- 34. Who stole Laban’s idols and what happened as a result? (31:30-32) ³⁴
- 35. Who suggested the covenant between Laban and Jacob? (31:44-55) ³⁵
- 36. Who met with Jacob after he departed from Laban? (Gen. 32:1-2) ³⁶



³² He was the first person who attempted to enslave the Jewish people and thereby thwart God’s redemptive plans for Israel. According to Jewish tradition, his grandson Balaam later became an advisor to the Pharaoh of Egypt who suggested the genocide of the Jewish people.

³³ The LORD told him: “Be careful what you say to Jacob – “from good to bad” (מִטּוֹב עַד-רָעָה). In other words, you have nothing to say about this, so hold your tongue...

³⁴ Rachel stole her father’s “gods” (which Jacob later made her bury). According to Jewish tradition, Rachel died before they reached Beersheva because Jacob swore that whoever took them would die.

³⁵ Laban wanted a covenant to be made that would serve as a “witness” between the two men. Jacob agreed and set up a mound or pile (*gal*) of stones to serve as a witness (*ed*), thereby calling the site *Galeed* (גַּלְעָד). It was also called a *mitzpa* (מִצְפָּה), or “watchtower.” The terms of the covenant were that Jacob would never oppress Laban’s daughters or take additional wives, and that Jacob’s family pledged no feud with Laban’s family (“I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, to do harm”). Interestingly, Laban swore in the Name of the “God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of his father” while Jacob swore by the “terror of his father Isaac,” referring to the Akedah experience. Jacob offered an animal sacrifice (זָבַח) to ratify the covenant which was partaken by the men of both camps.

³⁶ The angels of God (מַלְאָכֵי אֱלֹהִים) met with him at a place he called *Machanayim* (מַחֲנַיִם), “camps” (of God).



Discussion Topics:

- How do you understand the ladder (*sullam*) in Jacob's dream? Why were the angels ascending and descending? Rashi claims these were "guardian angels" – some for the Promised Land and others for Mesopotamia. Since angels can fly, however, why does the Torah describe them as climbing up and down a ladder?
- Yeshua told Nathanael that he was the *sullam* (ladder). Just as Jacob awoke and realized he was in the awesome presence of God, so Nathanael realized that he was in the presence of the very LORD of the universe!
- Just as Jacob deceived his father, so he was deceived in turn – first by Laban and then by Leah (and even by Rachel, who undoubtedly knew of the charade). Why did Laban "correct" his nephew by reminding him of the laws of primogeniture (i.e., the special role of the firstborn)?
- Who did Jacob regard as his firstborn son? Reuben or Joseph? What is the significance of Jacob's deathbed blessing of Judah (i.e., "Shiloh")?
- Who was the *primary* matriarch of Israel – Leah or Rachel? Is there any connection between the two women as "types" or pictures of the Jewish people?
- Jacob's last stop in the Promised Land before going into exile for nearly 20 years was at Bethel. But why does the LORD call Himself the "God of Abraham your father" and then almost parenthetically add "the God of Isaac"? Does this indicate an inward struggle regarding Jacob's understanding of his father Isaac?
- Jacob's vow (Gen. 28:20-22) seems *conditional*: "If God is with me... THEN the LORD shall be my God..." Was Jacob trying to "make a bargain" with God?
- Why was Jacob permitted to marry two women – and two *sisters*, for that matter – when the Torah later forbids this? How does this fit with Jewish tradition that maintains that Jacob (just like Abraham before him) "kept the entire Torah *before* it was given at Sinai" (Gen. 26:5)?
- Why do you think Rachel stole her father's idols?
- Jewish tradition regards *Ha-Makom* ("the place") as a Name for God. Explain the significance of this name and its connection with Moriah, the offering of Isaac, and the greater offering of Yeshua upon the cross.
- There is an inherent ambiguity when interpreting the singular noun "seed" (זֵרַע) as "descendants" (i.e., in a plural sense). Paul's use of this word in Gal. 3:16 is *literally* correct (when applied to Yeshua in the singular), but the texts found in the Torah clearly should be read in the *plural*, corresponding to the metaphorical use of "stars," "dust" and "sand" to represent the innumerable descendants of Israel. Discuss Paul's use of the word "seed" to refer to the promised Messiah.



Yeshua our Bridge...

And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (John 1:51).

In this passage Yeshua makes explicit reference to Jacob’s dream in Bethel. Just as Jacob saw the ladder (sullam) ascending to heaven with the angels of God ascending and descending upon it, so Yeshua tells Nathanael that He is the very Ladder to God, the true *sha’ar hashamayim* - the Way into heaven (John 14:6).

Yeshua is the “ladder” or bridge that connects heaven and earth... Heaven has indeed been opened and is mediated by the Life and grace of Messiah as our Way to God. Jacob dreamed a dream, but Yeshua became the Substance of that dream by willingly becoming the Promised Seed of Jacob. It is through Yeshua, the Promised Seed, that all the nations of the earth are blessed.

Yeshua is the true Temple or “house of God” (bet Elohim) and its Chief Cornerstone (Matthew 21:42). He is the divine communication (Word) from heaven to earth. The Son of Man is God’s link with the children of Adam (Dan. 7:13; Matt. 26:64). Yeshua is the new “Bethel,” God’s dwelling place (Gen. 28:17; John 1:14). Nathanael and the other disciples witnessed the glory of God come down to mankind in the Person and Life of Yeshua the Messiah. Just as Jacob awoke and realized he was in the awesome presence of God, so Nathanael realized that he was in the presence of the very LORD of the universe!

Heaven stands wide open and now the grace of God is available for every person who believes in the Son of Man. Yeshua is our Bridge. You can come into God’s presence by means Him. He is the “door” and the “gate.” No one comes to the Father except through Him. Ask Him to connect you with the infinite and loving condescension of heaven today....

For Next Week:

- Read Parashat **Vayishlach** (i.e., Genesis 32:3-36:43)
- Read the Haftarah (Obadiah 1:1-21)
- Read the New Testament (Heb. 11:11-20; Matt. 26:36-46)

