YOVEL PUBLICATIONS

THE WEEKLY TORAH & PROPHETS

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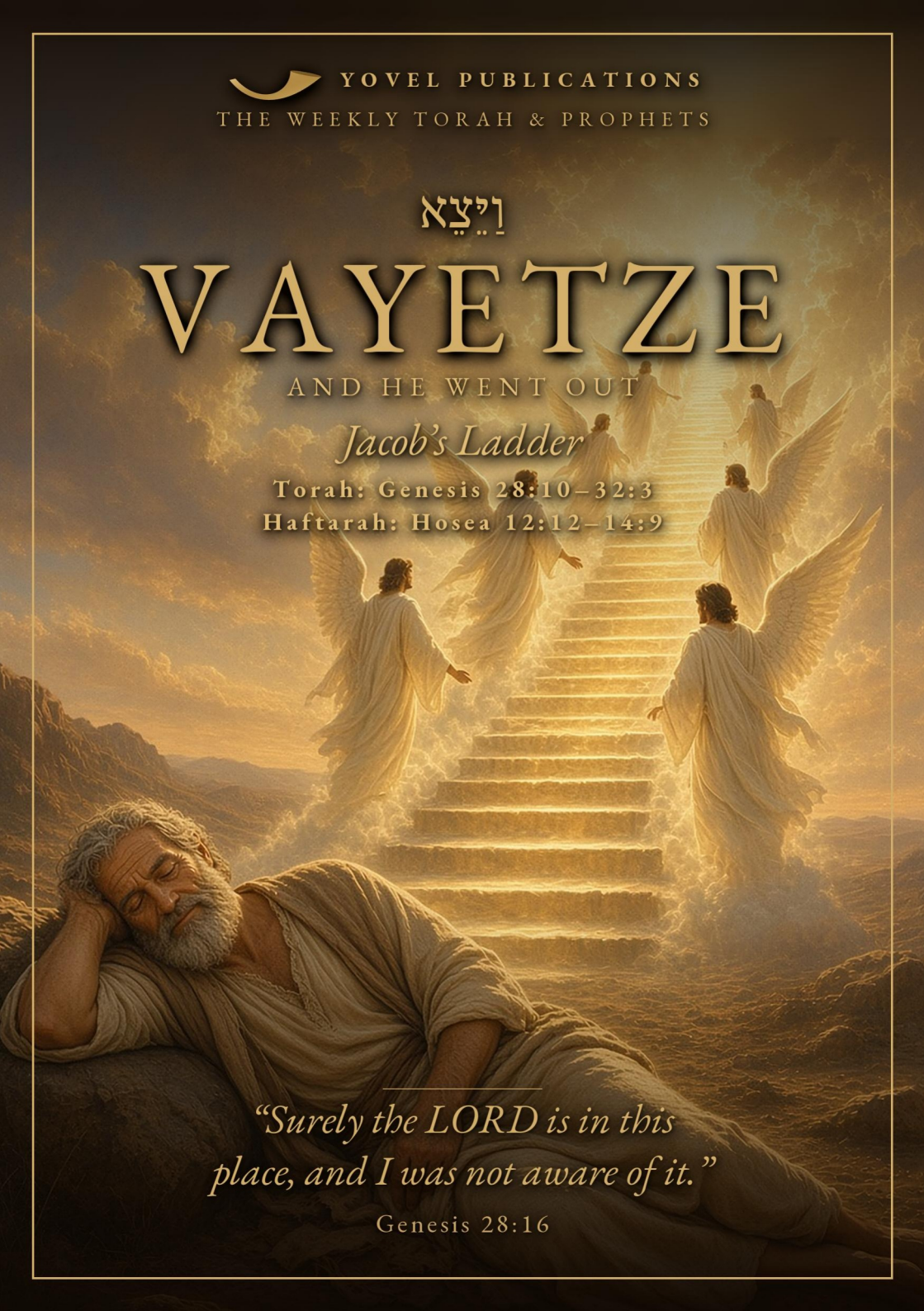
VAYETZE

AND HE WENT OUT

Jacob's Ladder

Torah: Genesis 28:10–32:3

Haftarah: Hosea 12:12–14:9



"Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it."

Genesis 28:16

YOVEL PUBLICATIONS

VAYETZEI

וַיֵּצֵא

And He Went Out

THE WEEKLY TORAH & PROPHETS

Torah: Genesis 28:10–32:2 (32:3 in the Hebrew numbering)
Haftarah: Hosea 12:12–14:9

SCRIPTURE SOURCE

Scripture quotations are based on the World Messianic Bible British Edition (WMBB), a public-domain translation. Where the WMBB renders the Hebrew Divine Name as LORD or GOD, Yovel Publications uses YHVH in accordance with its house style. Such adaptations are editorial choices of Yovel Publications and are not part of the original WMBB text.

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WHY READ THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION?

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For thousands of years, the people of God have gathered around the Scriptures to hear the words of Moses and the Prophets. The first followers of Yeshua did not regard these Scriptures as something belonging to a discarded religion or a bygone age. They were the Scriptures from which the Good News of Messiah was proclaimed.

The book of Acts gives us a wonderful glimpse of this practice. When Paul and his companions entered the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia on the Sabbath, we are told:

> *"After the reading of the Torah and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, 'Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, speak.'"*
>
> Acts 13:15

Paul then stood and proclaimed Yeshua from the story of Israel. The setting is important. The Torah and the Prophets were being read on the Sabbath, and it was from within that Scriptural framework that the apostles proclaimed Messiah.

Later in the same chapter, Gentiles also wanted to hear more:

> *"The next Sabbath, almost the whole city was gathered together to hear the word of God."*
>
> Acts 13:44

The earliest proclamation of Yeshua was therefore not detached from the Torah and the Prophets. It grew naturally out of them.

MOSES WROTE ABOUT ME

♦ ♦ ♦

Perhaps no reason for studying Torah could be stronger than the words of Yeshua Himself. Speaking to those who searched the Scriptures yet failed to recognise Him, Yeshua said:

> *"For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you don't believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"*
> John 5:46–47

MOSES WROTE ABOUT YESHUA.

That means Torah is not merely a collection of ancient laws and historical events. Within its pages are patterns, promises, shadows and prophetic pictures that point us toward Messiah.

The Passover lamb speaks of Him. The manna from heaven speaks of Him. The Rock in the wilderness speaks of Him. The tabernacle and priesthood speak of Him. The appointed Feasts speak of Him. The sacrifices, deliverances, covenants and great events of Torah continually prepare the reader to recognise the One who was to come.

Yeshua did not say that believing in Him should cause us to disregard Moses. He made the connection in the opposite direction: "If you believed Moses, you would believe Me." And then He gave the sobering counterpart: "If you don't believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

This changes the way we approach the Torah. We are not returning to Moses instead of following Yeshua. We are reading Moses because we follow Yeshua, and because Yeshua Himself told us that Moses wrote about Him.

After His resurrection, Yeshua demonstrated precisely this way of

reading Scripture. On the road to Emmaus:

> *"Beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."*
> Luke 24:27

Beginning with Moses, Yeshua showed His disciples the things written concerning Himself. That is the spirit in which these Weekly Torah Portion booklets are offered.

Each week we will walk through another portion of Torah, allowing Scripture to tell its own story while following the threads that run through the Prophets, the Writings and the Apostolic Scriptures. Along the way we will look for the patterns of redemption, covenant, Kingdom and restoration—and above all, we will look for Yeshua.

"HE WROTE ABOUT ME."

So open the Torah. Give ear. And let us discover what Moses has to tell us about Messiah.

A PRAYER BEFORE WE BEGIN

♦ ♦ ♦

The Psalmist prays directly to YHVH:

> *"Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of Your Torah."*
> Psalm 119:18

And so, before opening this week's portion, let us make that prayer our own:

> *YHVH, open our eyes as we open Your Word. Give us ears to hear and hearts ready to receive. Show us the wondrous things in Your Torah, and above all, help us to recognise Yeshua, the One of whom Moses wrote. Lead us by Your Spirit into truth, understanding and faithful obedience. Amen.*

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THE TORAH

VAYETZEI

וַיֵּצֵא

And He Went Out

Genesis 28:10–32:2

The stairway, the thief and the road home.

The Heir in Exile

♦ ♦ ♦

Jacob leaves the land with nothing but a staff. Heaven opens over him, and then he walks into twenty years in the house of a thief. Who is the real deceiver here? And who keeps faith with the heir in exile until He brings him home?

Vayetzei means "and he went out." The portion begins with a departure and ends with a camp of angels, and between them lie twenty years in Haran. Isaac has blessed Jacob with the blessing of Abraham and sent him away, so the heir of the promise leaves the land of the promise. What becomes of such an heir when he is far from home, with no inheritance in his hands and a man like Laban over him?

Scripture answers before Jacob has met a single person in Haran. At Bethel YHVH stands above a stairway that joins earth to heaven and says: "I am with you, and will keep you, wherever you go, and will bring you again into this land." That is the whole portion in one sentence. YHVH keeps the heir in exile, and YHVH brings him home.

Everything that follows works out that promise. Laban changes the wages ten times, and YHVH sees it. Eleven sons and a daughter are born in a foreign country, and with Benjamin, born later in the land, the sons become the twelve tribes. Laban pursues, and God Himself stops him. Toldot showed us the enemy at work in this family: Esau accused the heir of theft. Now Laban takes up the same charge, while the one who has actually taken from the heir is Laban himself.

The Haftarah, from Hosea, speaks to the descendants of this same Jacob. They have grown comfortable in exile and in idolatry, and the prophet begins by reminding them where they came from: "Jacob fled into the

country of Aram." It ends with the call every exile needs to hear: "Israel, return to YHVH your God."

Jacob meets his bride at a well in Haran, and John sits Yeshua down at Jacob's well, on the ground Jacob gave to Joseph, back in the land. Through the whole Torah portion one Person stands at the centre. He is the stairway between heaven and earth, the Door, the Shepherd who bears the loss, and the Bridegroom who serves for His bride. He is the One who will bring His people home. The question is, who keeps faith with the heir? The answer has a name.

The Stairway and the Gate

♦ ♦ ♦

Genesis 28:10–22

Begin with where Jacob sleeps. Beersheba, the well of the oath, is behind him, and the land of promise grows more distant with every mile. He lies down with a stone under his head, a traveller with nothing, and Scripture records what heaven does:

> *"He dreamt and saw a stairway set upon the earth, and its top reached to heaven. Behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it."*
> Genesis 28:12

The Hebrew word for stairway is Sulam, and it occurs here and nowhere else in Scripture. It comes from the verb Salal, to cast up, to raise, the word Isaiah uses when he calls for a highway: "Build up, build up, prepare the way!" (Isaiah 57:14). A Sulam is a raised way, and the first thing to notice is where it stands. It is set on the earth, and its top reaches heaven.

Men had tried this before. At Babel they said, "Come, let's build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top reaches to the sky." Babel was a way built upward by men who wanted to establish a name for themselves. Bethel is a way let down by God to a man who was not looking for Him. Heaven has to come down.

Above the stairway YHVH stands and speaks. He gives Jacob in person the same promise made to Abraham, "In you and in your offspring, all the families of the earth will be blessed," and then He adds the promise Jacob will need for the road ahead:

> *"Behold, I am with you, and will keep you, wherever you go, and*

will bring you again into this land. For I will not leave you until I have done that which I have spoken of to you."
Genesis 28:15

Three promises are in that sentence: YHVH will be with him, keep him and bring him again. The Hebrew word for keep is Shamar, meaning to guard as a shepherd guards a flock. The words bring again come from the Hebrew word Shuv, meaning to return. Both words will return.

Jacob wakes and answers:

"How awesome this place is! This is none other than God's house, and this is the gate of heaven."
Genesis 28:17

Now hear what Yeshua does with this dream. When Nathanael comes to Him, Yeshua says of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!" Nathanael is a son of Israel, and in the portion where Laban is the master of deceit, he stands as a picture of what an Israelite is meant to be. When Nathanael confesses Him as King of Israel, Yeshua takes him straight to Jacob's dream:

"Most certainly, I tell you all, hereafter you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."
John 1:51

The Son of Man stands where the stairway stood. Jacob saw a way between heaven and earth, and Yeshua says that He is that way. John has already told us how: "The Word became flesh and lived amongst us." Heaven came down to earth and pitched its tent in the flesh of a man. That is why He can say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through Me."

If you have been reading the Gospel of John with us at the Sabbath

meetings, you will have noticed what John is doing. He opens his Gospel with the same words that open the Bible. John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." He is reading Genesis to us, but he reads it through the lens of Yeshua. Later in the same chapter he gives Nathanael insight into Jacob's stairway, and shortly afterwards Yeshua says to Nicodemus:

"No one has ascended into heaven but He who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven."
John 3:13

Here is the stairway again, but without the picture. No one reaches heaven by his own climbing, as Babel showed, but the only One who joins heaven and earth is the One who came down from heaven. In the next chapter, John sits Yeshua down at Jacob's own well. John is not quoting Genesis for decoration. He is reading it to us, and showing us who it was about.

The gate of heaven is also referred to by Yeshua:

"I am the door. If anyone enters in by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and go out and will find pasture."
John 10:9

The gate is a Person, and at the end of the age, gates are seen again. The New Jerusalem has "twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel."

Jacob takes the stone that had been under his head, sets it up as a pillar, and pours oil on it (Genesis 28:18). He names the place Bethel, which means house of God. Years later, YHVH recalls it: "I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar." The Hebrew word for anointed is Mashach, the root of Mashiach, Messiah, the Anointed One. This is the

first time the verb appears in Scripture. The first thing ever anointed is a stone set up as the house of God.

The Apostles use the same picture of an anointed stone to speak of Messiah. Peter writes, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, chosen and precious," and he adds that we, "as living stones are built up as a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5–6). The Anointed One is the stone, and the house of God is built on Him.

Jacob answers with a vow that gives the promise back to YHVH: "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 put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, and YHVH will be my God" (Genesis 28:20–21). He adds, "Of all that You will give me I will surely give a tenth to You." The promise comes first, and the vow answers it in covenant faithfulness.

Ahead of Jacob lies Haran, and a well in a field.

The Bridegroom at the Well

♦ ♦ ♦

Genesis 29:1–14

"Are You greater than our father Jacob?" A woman of Samaria asks it of a tired stranger sitting at Jacob's well, and this chapter gives the answer. To hear it, we begin at the well Jacob found when he first came to Haran.

Jacob walks on from Bethel to "the land of the children of the east" (Genesis 29:1). He sees a well in a field, three flocks lying beside it, and a stone on its mouth that is large. The shepherds roll it away only when all the flocks are gathered. Then Rachel comes with her father's sheep, and Jacob does what the shepherds were waiting to do together:

> *"Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother."*
> Genesis 29:10

"Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept" (Genesis 29:11). The heir who left home with a staff has found the woman he will love. She ran and told her father, and Laban "ran to meet Jacob, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house." His first words are a welcome: "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." The exile has been received, and Scripture records it warmly.

This is not the first time Scripture sets a bridegroom's story beside a well. Abraham sent his servant to a far country to find a wife for Isaac, and the servant waited by a well at evening. Rebekah, Jacob's own mother, came out, and Scripture gives her one of its warmest portraits:

> *"She hurried, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again to the well to draw, and drew for all his camels."*
> Genesis 24:20

Rebekah gave freely, she ran to tell her household, and she went to a bridegroom she had never seen. The servant is the 'friend of the bridegroom': he goes out, finds the bride at the water, and brings her home. Her son Jacob finds Rachel at a well in the same country. Moses, refused by his own people and hunted by Pharaoh, sat down by a well in Midian and received Zipporah, a bride from the nations. In each story a bridegroom comes to a well, and the bride is found at the water.

John the Baptist calls himself 'the friend of the Bridegroom'. That is the same role Abraham's servant played when he brought the bride to Isaac, and John says it just before Yeshua comes to the well in John 4:

> *"He who has the bride is the Bridegroom; but the friend of the Bridegroom, who stands and hears Him, rejoices greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice."*
> John 3:29

The Gospel of John places this event in the days after Passover, when the Song of Songs has been read, and the counting of the Omer carries Israel on towards Shavuot and the reading of the book of Ruth. It is a season all about the Bridegroom and His bride, and the Gospel of John takes us to one more well, the well that bears Jacob's name.

The Bridegroom Himself comes to a well in John 4. Yeshua comes "to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph." This is the same place where Abram built his first altar in the land, where YHVH said, "I will give this land to your offspring." Here Jacob bought a field and raised his own altar, named El Elohe Israel, God the God of Israel. It is here the bones of Joseph were laid "in the parcel of ground which Jacob bought." Jacob had called Joseph "a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine by a spring," and now the Bridegroom sits beside a spring in Joseph's own ground, in the territory of Ephraim, the northern house Hosea addresses.

Joseph was rejected by his brothers and afterwards he saved them, a picture of Yeshua at His first coming. Yet Jacob gave the sceptre to Judah (Genesis 49:10), and the One who sits at Joseph's well is Judah's King. After listening to Yeshua, the woman speaks:

> *"Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his children and his livestock?"*
> John 4:12

Jacob saw the stairway in a dream (Genesis 28:12), and the One who stood above it is sitting at his well, "the Son of Man, who is in heaven," and asking a Samaritan for a drink.

John marks the sixth hour twice. At the well Yeshua is tired from His journey and sits down, and "it was about the sixth hour"; at the cross Pilate brings Him out "at about the sixth hour" and says, "Behold, your King!" The One who asks a Samaritan for water at noon, which is the sixth hour, is the One who will say "I am thirsty!" on the cross for His bride.

Yeshua then offers the Samaritan woman what Jacob's well cannot give:

> *"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."*
> John 4:10

The phrase 'living water' is YHVH's own description of Himself: "they have forsaken Me, the spring of living waters, and cut out cisterns for themselves: broken cisterns that can't hold water" (Jeremiah 2:13). A well dug by hand is a cistern. The spring is YHVH.

At the feast of Tabernacles Yeshua stood and cried, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink!" and John tells us that "He said this about the Spirit." Isaiah promised, "Therefore with joy you will draw water out

of the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3). The Hebrew word for salvation there is Yeshuah, from the same root as the name Yeshua. At Haran, Jacob rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock. After His resurrection Yeshua pours out the Spirit on His own.

Yeshua then asks her to call her husband. Her answer, "I have no husband," is true, and His reply is exact: "you have had five husbands; and he whom you now have is not your husband."

Samaria had done the same. When Assyria carried the northern kingdom away, five peoples were settled in Samaria, from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim, and "every nation made gods of their own" (2 Kings 17:29). They "feared YHVH, and also served their own gods" (2 Kings 17:33). Five peoples had come into the land, and none of them was her husband. The true Husband is YHVH Himself, and through Hosea He promises the day His bride comes home: "you will call Me 'my husband'" (Hosea 2:16).

The woman from Samaria understands at once that she is speaking to more than a stranger: "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet." The Samaritans held to the Torah of Moses, and waited for the Prophet Moses promised, the same Moses who found his bride Zipporah at a well. She raises the question of location, Gerizim or Jerusalem (John 4:20). Yeshua answers: first, "salvation is from the Jews." The Messiah comes through Judah. The location no longer decides anything: "the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such to be His worshippers." She answers with what she knows: "I know that Messiah is coming ... When He has come, He will declare to us all things." And Yeshua says:

"I am He, the one who speaks to you."
John 4:26

Her response is to leave "her water pot," the cistern, at the well and

return to the town to tell everyone. Rachel "ran and told her father," and Rebekah "ran, and told her mother's house." The Samaritan woman also runs to the city: "Come, see a man who told me everything that I have done. Can this be the Messiah?" The Samaritans ask Him to stay, and He stays two days. Then they say, "this is indeed the Messiah, the Saviour of the world."

Samaria is the old house of Joseph, carried away by Assyria and mixed with five peoples, and the Samaritan woman hears the Bridegroom's voice and believes. As we will see later in this study, Ezekiel will take two sticks and make them one (Ezekiel 37:16–17). Here Judah's King is received at the well of Joseph. Before He ascended He told His witnesses:

> *"You will be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth."*
> Acts 1:8

"Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Messiah" (Acts 8:5), and when Peter and John came to Samaria, "they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:17). The living water reached Samaria. At the end of the age the last invitation in Scripture is to a well:

> *"The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' ... He who is thirsty, let him come. He who desires, let him take the water of life freely."*
> Revelation 22:17

The woman who came to draw water at noon is counted among that bride. But we are still at Haran in Genesis 29, and the man who ran out to embrace Jacob is about to speak of wages.

The Bride and the Thief

♦ ♦ ♦

Genesis 29:15–30; 30:25–31:16

Jacob has met the house of God, and at the well he has met his bride. Now he meets the house of a thief. A month after the embrace, Laban speaks of wages: "should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what will your wages be?" Jacob asks for Rachel, and serves seven years for her:

> *"Jacob served seven years for Rachel. They seemed to him but a few days, for the love he had for her."*
> Genesis 29:20

Hosea comes back to this narrative in our Haftarah: "Israel served to get a wife. For a wife he tended flocks and herds."

A man who serves for his bride is one of Scripture's great pictures of Messiah. Paul says, "Messiah also loved the assembly and gave Himself up for her." The Bridegroom serves, and the price He pays is far greater than seven years. Revelation shows the result of Messiah's service: "the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."

But Jacob has stepped into the house of a deceiver, and Laban acts at once.

> *"In the morning, behold, it was Leah! He said to Laban, 'What is this you have done to me? Didn't I serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?'"*
> Genesis 29:25

Jacob served for Rachel, and Laban made a feast and brought Leah to him in the dark. Notice Laban's defence: "It is not done so in our place, to give the younger before the firstborn." The heir who received the

blessing as the younger son is now told by a thief that the younger may not go first. That is how the accuser works. He takes what YHVH has done and throws it back as an accusation.

Some readers treat Laban's trick as something Jacob deserved. Scripture does not say that. It gives Jacob's own verdict, "Why then have you deceived me?" and later it gives YHVH's: "I have seen all that Laban does to you." The deceiver is Laban, and YHVH names him as the deceiver.

Laban's wealth comes directly from his nephew. When Jacob asks to be sent home, Laban answers, "I have divined that YHVH has blessed me for your sake." The Hebrew word is Nichash, meaning to practise divination, and it shares its three root letters with Nachash, the serpent of Eden. Laban knows the Name, and he has read the signs. He sees that YHVH's blessing is on the heir, and his answer is to keep the heir and use him.

So the wages begin to change. Jacob later tells his wives, "Your father has deceived me, and changed my wages ten times, but God didn't allow him to hurt me." Leah and Rachel agree with him, and what they say about their own father is worth hearing: "Aren't we considered as foreigners by him? For he has sold us, and has also used up our money." By their own account, the man who gave Jacob a bride in the dark had sold his own daughters and spent the price.

Meanwhile Jacob keeps the flock. He tells Laban what the work cost him:

> *"That which was torn of animals, I didn't bring to you. I bore its loss. Of my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night."*
> Genesis 31:39

This is the heir who bears the loss. Jacob suffered: by day the drought consumed him and by night the frost, and his sleep fled from his eyes.

Yeshua describes the same kind of shepherd: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." (John 10:11). The hired hand sees the wolf and leaves. The shepherd stays and pays.

In the previous verse Yeshua names the other figure: "The thief only comes to steal, kill, and destroy. I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." (John 10:10). Laban is a man who demanded payment for whatever thieves took, from the shepherd who had already borne the loss, while he himself was taking the shepherd's wages ten times over. The question of who is the real thief has an answer in Haran, and it is not Jacob.

And YHVH sees. The One who stood above the stairway now speaks to Jacob in a dream:

> *"Now lift up your eyes, and behold, all the male goats which leap on the flock are streaked, speckled, and grizzled, for I have seen all that Laban does to you."*
> Genesis 31:12

YHVH sees what is done to the heir, and He acts. Then He says: "Now arise, get out from this land, and return to the land of your birth." The exile ends at His word.

In the meantime, in the house of the thief, a family has been growing. Jacob's eleven sons and a daughter are born in Laban's house, and each is a seed of the promise.

The Sons Born in Exile

♦ ♦ ♦

Genesis 29:31–30:24

No one would have designed it this way. Eleven of the sons of Israel, and a daughter, are born in a foreign country, in the house of a deceiver, to two sisters who live in rivalry. Scripture records the rivalry plainly and does not commend it. What it emphasises is what YHVH does with a household like this. With Benjamin, born later in the land, these sons become the twelve tribes whose names Revelation writes on the gates of the New Jerusalem. The Kingdom is built from what YHVH makes in exile.

The birth of the tribes begins with an unloved woman:

"YHVH saw that Leah was hated, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren."

Genesis 29:31

YHVH sees the one the household overlooks. Leah names her first sons for what He has done: "YHVH has looked at my affliction." "YHVH has heard that I am hated." Then she names her fourth son:

"This time I will praise YHVH."

Genesis 29:35

Leah calls him Judah. The Hebrew is Yehudah, and it comes from the word Yadah, to praise, to give thanks. Look at where that word goes. Many years later, at the end of his life, Jacob blesses this son with the same verb: "Judah, your brothers will praise you." An unloved woman's thanksgiving becomes the name of the tribe of kings. And Jacob continues:

"The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff

from between his feet, until He comes to whom it belongs. The obedience of the peoples will be to Him."
Genesis 49:10

That is Messiah, and the Apostolic Scriptures claim it without hesitation. Matthew opens with Jacob, "the father of Judah and his brothers." The book of Hebrews says, "our Lord has sprung out of Judah." And in heaven the elder says to John, "Behold, the Lion who is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome." The King comes through the son of the unloved wife. The line that was overlooked is the line of the Kingdom.

Rachel, the beloved, is barren for years. Then "God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her, and opened her womb." She names her son Joseph, Yoseph, from Yasaf, to add: "May YHVH add another son to me." Joseph's son Ephraim gives his name to the northern house of Israel, as Judah gives his to the southern, and so Judah and Joseph become the two houses.

Scripture follows those two houses all the way to the end. The rivalry between the sisters is followed by a division between the houses, and Hosea is speaking to Ephraim. But the prophets promise a day when the division is healed, and Ezekiel is told to take two sticks:

"I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. One king will be king to them all. They will no longer be two nations. They won't be divided into two kingdoms any more at all."
Ezekiel 37:22

Who is that king? Ezekiel names Him a few verses later: "My servant David will be king over them. They all will have one shepherd." He is the Son of David, the Shepherd-King, and Isaiah describes how the long rivalry ends: "Ephraim won't envy Judah, and Judah won't

persecute Ephraim." The two houses that began in Haran are reunited by the Messiah, the one Shepherd.

The last son is born in the land itself, on the road to Ephrath, which is also called Bethlehem. Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin, and Scripture records the two names he is given:

> *"As her soul was departing (for she died), she named him Benoni, but his father named him Benjamin."*
> Genesis 35:18

Ben-Oni means son of my sorrow, and Benjamin means son of the right hand. That is a picture of Messiah. Yeshua was "despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering," and now He has "sat down at the right hand of God."

Rachel is not forgotten in that day. Her grave is on that road, and the prophet hears her still:

> *"A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more."*
> Jeremiah 31:15

Matthew hears that voice at Bethlehem, where Herod's soldiers came for the children, and the dragon stood before the woman to devour her child. But the prophecy does not end with weeping. YHVH answers Rachel in the next breath: "They will come again from the land of the enemy." "Your children will come again to their own territory."

Come again. The Hebrew word is Shuv, the same word as in the promise at Bethel.

And in the house of Laban, the time has come for it to be spoken.

The Return and the Accuser

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Genesis 31:17–32:2

The exile ends the way every exile ends in Scripture, by the word of YHVH.

> *"Return to the land of your fathers, and to your relatives, and I will be with you."*
> Genesis 31:3

Here is Shuv again, and the circle is now complete. At Bethel YHVH said, "I will bring you again." At Bethel Jacob vowed, "that I come again to my father's house in peace." Now YHVH says, Shuv, return. Jacob had asked to be sent home years earlier, and Laban had kept him. The exile did not end when Jacob asked or when Laban allowed. It ended when YHVH said so.

Scripture says plainly how Jacob left: "Jacob deceived Laban the Syrian, in that he didn't tell him that he was running away." The Hebrew is 'Ganav Lev', which means literally "stole the heart of Laban." In Hebrew thinking, the heart is the seat of the mind, and to steal someone's heart is to leave him in the dark. Scripture explains what the idiom means in the same verse: Jacob did not tell him. Nothing is hidden there, and nothing needs to be softened.

Scripture also gives the circumstances. Laban's sons were saying that Jacob had taken everything. YHVH had told him to go. His wives had answered, "whatever God has said to you, do." And Jacob gives his own reason: "I was afraid, for I said, 'Lest you should take your daughters from me by force.'" When Laban charges him with stealing his household gods, Jacob answers in innocence, "Anyone you find your gods

with shall not live." Rachel had taken them without his knowledge.

Notice the word that runs through this chapter. The Hebrew word Ganav, to steal, is on everyone's lips. Rachel takes the household gods. Scripture says Jacob stole Laban's heart. Laban asks, "why have you stolen my gods?" and Jacob answers that Laban required of him everything "stolen by day or stolen by night." The question we began with has returned. Who is the thief? One man changed the wages ten times. One man pursued for seven days with a company of his relatives. And when Laban searches the camp for the gods he says were stolen, he finds them under a camel's saddle. Gods that can be stolen cannot save.

But the pursuit does not go the way Laban intends.

> *"God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream of the night, and said to him, 'Be careful that you don't speak to Jacob either good or bad.'"*
> Genesis 31:24

Laban admits it to Jacob's face: "It is in the power of my hand to hurt you, but the God of your father spoke to me last night." The deceiver is restrained. This is what it means that YHVH will keep him. The Keeper stands between the heir and the pursuer.

Jacob asks, "What is my trespass? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me?" (Genesis 31:36). Laban has searched every tent and found nothing of his. The accuser has gone through the whole camp and found nothing.

This is the pattern of the accuser from Esau's charge to the last day. Revelation 12 names him: "the accuser of our brothers ... who accuses them before our God day and night." And Paul gives the heirs their answer: "Who could bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who justifies." The heirs stand because Messiah died, was raised, and

intercedes for them.

The shape of this story is the shape of the exodus. A man serves in a foreign land. His master takes advantage of him, and the family multiplies. They leave with great wealth. The master is told they have gone and pursues, and God stops the pursuer. Exodus tells it about Pharaoh: "The king of Egypt was told that the people had fled," and he "pursued the children of Israel." Genesis tells it first about one man, before Israel is a nation. And Revelation tells it of the end of the age:

> *"The serpent spewed water out of his mouth after the woman like a river, that he might cause her to be carried away by the stream. The earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the river which the dragon spewed out of his mouth."*
> Revelation 12:15–16

The enemy still pursues the heirs who are leaving his house, and YHVH still keeps them.

Laban and Jacob make a covenant. Jacob sets up a pillar, as he had at Bethel, and Laban says, "YHVH watch between me and you, when we are absent one from another." The name is Mizpah, the watchtower, from the Hebrew word for watch. It is a boundary agreement, and the God who watches both sides is its witness. Laban names "the God of Nahor" beside the God of Abraham, and Jacob swears only "by the fear of his father, Isaac." Then Laban kisses his sons and daughters, blesses them, and goes home. And Jacob goes on:

> *"Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When he saw them, Jacob said, 'This is God's army.' He called the name of that place Mahanaim."*
> Genesis 32:1–2

The Hebrew word Mahanaim comes from Machaneh, a camp or a host,

the word used of Israel's camp in the wilderness. The name is a plural: two camps. Soon Jacob will say, "with just my staff I crossed over this Jordan; and now I have become two companies." He left the land with a staff. He returns with a family and a flock, and a camp of angels meets him at the border. At Bethel the angels were going up and down. Here they come to meet him on the road.

Yeshua says that at the end of the age the angels of God will come again: "He will send out His angels with a great sound of a shofar, and they will gather together His chosen ones from the four winds." The heirs who come home from exile are met by the host of God.

But Esau is waiting on the road ahead, in the land of Seir, and that meeting belongs to the next portion.

For now the Haftarah asks a question the Torah has just answered with one man's journey. What happens when the heirs forget their Keeper?

THE PROPHETS

HAFTARAH

Hosea 12:12–14:9

The Keeper forgotten, and the call to return.

Hosea — Return, Israel

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Hosea 12:12–14:9

Hosea was a prophet to the northern kingdom, the house of Ephraim, and his Hebrew name is Hoshea, from the word Yasha, to save. It is the root of the name Yeshua. He prophesied to a people heading for exile who had forgotten who kept them, and he opens our reading with their own beginning:

"Jacob fled into the country of Aram. Israel served to get a wife.
For a wife he tended flocks and herds."
Hosea 12:12

This verse summarises the Torah portion in three sentences, and Hosea uses it to remind Jacob's descendants where their story began. The Hebrew word for "tended" is Shamar, the word YHVH spoke at Bethel: "will keep you." Jacob kept a flock for a wife. In the next verse the same word is turned around: "By a prophet YHVH brought Israel up out of Egypt, and by a prophet he was preserved." Preserved is the word Shamar again, in a form meaning 'was kept'. Jacob kept the sheep, and YHVH kept Jacob. YHVH kept Israel through a prophet, and Moses himself said that another would come: "YHVH your God will raise up to you a prophet from amongst you, of your brothers, like me. You shall listen to Him." Peter says that this prophet is Yeshua.

The people have forgotten their Keeper. What do they trust in instead? Jeroboam had set up two golden calves, one in Bethel, and told the people, "Look and behold your gods, Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" The place Jacob called the house of God had become a place for calves. Hosea calls the place Beth Aven. Aven means wickedness and emptiness. The people, he says, "kiss the calves."

Laban's gods turned up under a saddle. Ephraim's gods are poured from molten silver by craftsmen. Both kinds of god can be carried, stolen or melted, and neither can save. YHVH answers the whole business with one sentence:

> *"Yet I am YHVH your God from the land of Egypt; and you shall acknowledge no god but Me, and besides Me there is no saviour."*
> Hosea 13:4

Hosea's own name is that sentence: YHVH saves. The angel told Joseph the same about Miriam's son: "You shall name Him Yeshua, for it is He who shall save His people from their sins."

Hosea does not soften what the calves bring. Ephraim is "an unwise son, for when it is time, he doesn't come to the opening of the womb." He lingers in exile like a child who will not come out when the hour of birth arrives. Jacob went out when YHVH said, "Return." Ephraim stays where he is. Yeshua uses the image of birth pains for the last days: "all these things are the beginning of birth pains."

Then, in the middle of the judgement, the prophet reaches the greatest promise in the book:

> *"I will ransom them from the power of Sheol. I will redeem them from death! Death, where are your plagues? Sheol, where is your destruction?"*
> Hosea 13:14

The two Hebrew words are Padah, to ransom, and Ga'al, to redeem. Hosea promises a people deep in exile more than a return to the land. YHVH will pay for them and bring them back from death itself. Paul takes up the question when he writes of the resurrection: "Death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your sting? Sheol, where is

your victory?" And Revelation sees the day: "Death and Sheol were thrown into the lake of fire." The last enemy is abolished, and the heirs who were kept through every exile are raised.

After that the call comes:

> *"Israel, return to YHVH your God; for you have fallen because of your sin. Take words with you, and return to YHVH."*
> Hosea 14:1–2

The word is Shuvah, the call to return, built on Shuv. It is the word YHVH spoke to Jacob in Haran. Jacob heard it and went. Now the whole house of Israel is told to hear it. They are to bring words and not animals, the "bulls" of the lips, which the book of Hebrews describes this way: "let's offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which proclaim allegiance to His name." The offering of the New Covenant is the confession of the lips, and the Priesthood of believers brings it.

Then YHVH gives His own answer:

> *"I will heal their waywardness. I will love them freely; for My anger is turned away from them."*
> Hosea 14:4

The Hebrew for waywardness is Meshuvah, turning away, and it is built on the very root of Shuv. The same root that means to turn back also means to turn away, and YHVH promises to heal the turning away. Peter tells us how the healing was done: "You were healed by His wounds."

And the end of the age is in view. Jeremiah hears the same return: "the children of Israel will come, they and the children of Judah together; they will go on their way weeping, and will seek YHVH their God." That is Judah and Ephraim, the sons of Leah and Rachel, brought home together under David's Son.

The prophet ends the book with the picture that follows the return. Israel blossoms like the lily, and the people "dwell in his shade." Then comes the last verse:

> *"Who is wise, that he may understand these things? Who is prudent, that he may know them? For the ways of YHVH are right, and the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them."*
> Hosea 14:9

Isaiah told Israel to prepare the way, and Jacob saw a raised way between heaven and earth. Yeshua says, "I am the way." The righteous walk in Him, and those who refuse Him stumble.

Living as Pilgrims

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We began with a question. Who is the real deceiver, and who keeps faith with the heir in exile until He brings him home?

The deceiver is the one who takes the heir's wages, changes them ten times, and then charges the heir with theft. He sets up calves where the house of God should be, and he pursues the heirs when they leave his house. He is the thief, the liar and the deceiver of the whole world.

The One who keeps faith is the God of Bethel. He sees all that is done to His heirs. He restrained Laban in a dream, and He said, Shuv, return. Then He came down Himself and made Himself the way. Yeshua says, "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." It is the promise of Bethel, spoken again by the Son of Man.

Metaphorically, we live in Haran. The Letter to the Hebrews says of the fathers, "they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth," and "now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." We work faithfully where the wages change. We do not carry Laban's gods in our saddles. We keep a Bethel, a place where we meet YHVH. And when He says Shuv, we go.

The house of God Jacob saw in a dream is coming. John saw it come down: "God's dwelling is with people; and He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God." There is no temple in it, "for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple."

Will we return when He says return?

Yes, come, Lord Yeshua!

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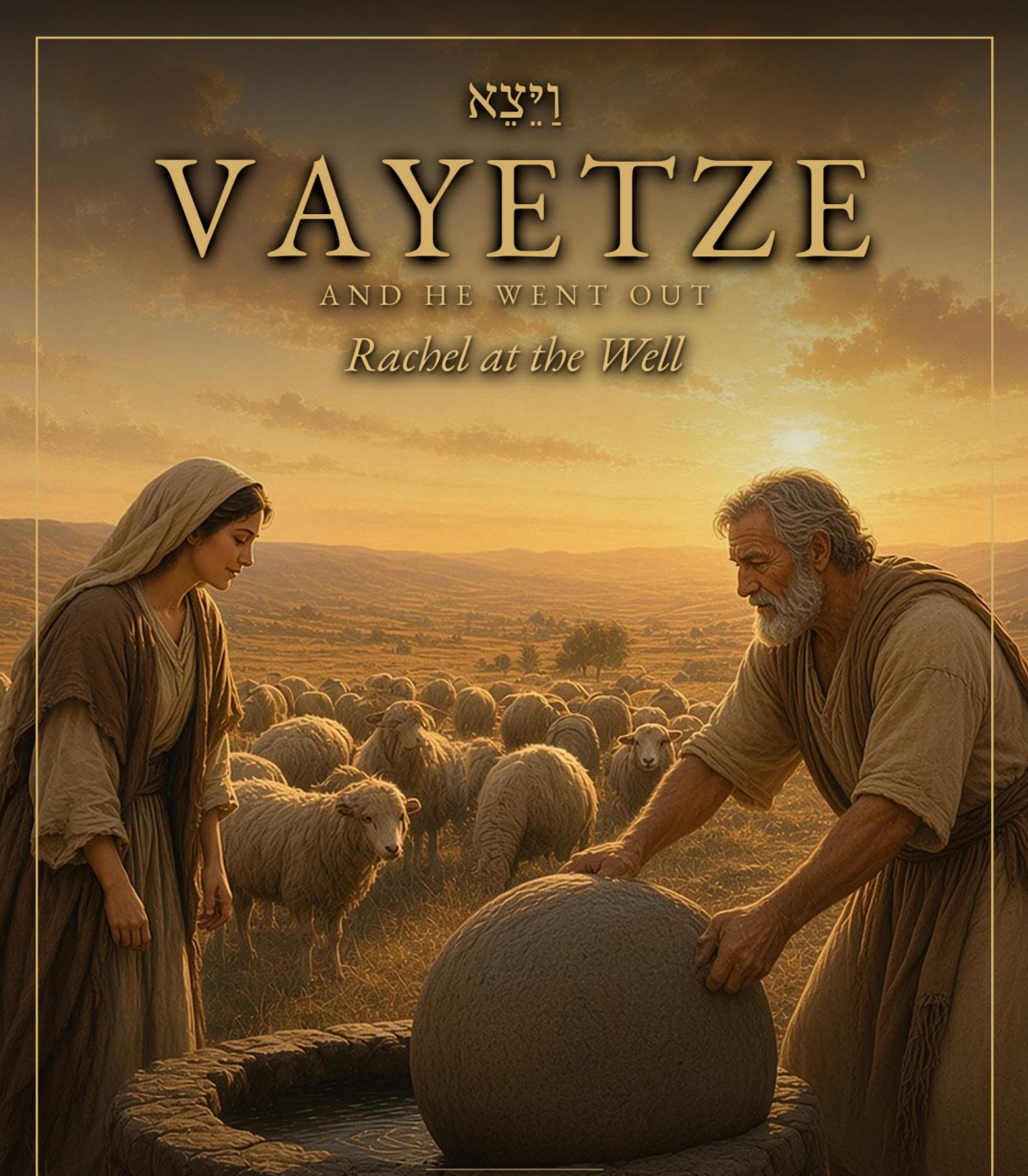
VAYETZE

AND HE WENT OUT

Rachel at the Well



"Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud."

Genesis 29:11

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