

Parashah 7

Vayetze

ויצא

“He went out”

Genesis 28:10 – 32:3

Torah Together



This *Torah* portion covers about 20 years in Jacob’s life, telling of his journey to Haran where he meets his uncle and finds a wife for himself. It also documents the births of his children and tells of his leaving Haran to return to his father’s house. Much about Jacob’s character can be learned in this portion.

1. Jacob leaves home - 28:10-22

a) When Jacob left Beer Sheva, where was he headed? What were the reasons for this destination? What were the two reasons he was leaving home? How do you think Jacob felt as he left on his journey?

b) Where did Jacob stop to spend the night on his journey? Describe the dream that Jacob had here. How would you interpret his dream?

c) What did God say to Jacob that night? What was Jacob’s response?



Scripture Link:

Genesis 12:6-8 tells the story of Abraham’s first meeting with God in the Promised Land at Bethel. It was very likely on this same spot where Jacob slept and had his dream. **Genesis 31:13** records that Jacob remembered this spot as the place where God met with him. Finally, in **Genesis 35:1-14**, we see that Jacob returns to this very spot, just as God had promised.

Jacob's Vow

Some may see the vow that Jacob makes to God in verses 20-22 as a bargain with God – “If you do this, I'll do that.” But God had already promised to be with Jacob and to watch over him. So Jacob's vow was done out of a heart of gratitude, an offering for the blessings of God that he believed he would receive on his journey.

The Stone covering the Well

It seems that the stone covering the well was so large that it took all of the shepherds together to move it from the mouth of the well. This would force all of the users of the well to be together to water their flocks. Can you see any implications in this?

Jacob's Arrival at Haran

As Jacob kisses Rachel and begins to weep, you get a feeling for the stress he was under during his journey. It must have been a difficult and frightening experience for him, but now he had arrived at his destination and God had indeed guided and protected him.

d) What does Beth-El mean? Do you know the location of Bethel? Why did Jacob set up a 'mazzevah' or sacred pillar at Bethel and anoint it with oil?

e) What vow did Jacob make to God that day? What was God's part and what was Jacob's part?

2. Jacob at the Well - 29:1-14

a) Jacob arrived at a well near Haran (in Paddan-Aram). What was the purpose of the stone covering the well? What does this imply about the people that used this well?

b) Jacob inquired about Laban's family and met Rachel. Why do you think that Jacob “kissed her and wept aloud” (verse 11)?

c) What do you think Laban thought when he heard about Jacob from Rachel? Do you think there is any hidden meaning in his statement, “You are my own flesh and blood”?

3. Jacob Works for a Dowry - 29:15-31

a) After a month, Laban offered to pay Jacob for his work. What does this say about the kind of worker Jacob was? What was Jacob's "price"? Do you think Laban was surprised by the proposal?

b) What were the differences between Rachel & Leah? What do you think is meant by "weak eyes"? How did the seven years seem to pass for Jacob? Why?

c) When Jacob awakened and found he had married the wrong woman, how do you think he felt? Do you think Leah & Rachel were "in on" the deception? How do you think they felt about it? What did Jacob do? What was Laban's excuse for the deception?

“. . . And Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah.”

Genesis 29:30

d) Besides two wives, what else did Jacob end up with? Based on verses 30 & 31, do you think Jacob was at fault for his treatment of Leah?

Jacob's Dowry

Jacob had no dowry with which to obtain a bride. (See **Jacob's Dowry** in the previous lesson.) Laban recognized that Jacob was a hard worker and he had probably noticed that Jacob was in love with Rachel. It was a good business decision to accept seven years of Jacob's labor for Rachel's hand in marriage.

Leah's Weak Eyes

It's not clear exactly what this phrase means. Some think that Leah may have been nearsighted. Others believe that the word might be better translated as "delicate" or "lovely." In any case, Rachel was seen as the more attractive of the two sisters as she is described as "lovely in form and beautiful."

A Wedding & Deception

In ancient near-eastern weddings, the bride remained fully concealed in clothing during the ceremony and awaited her new husband in a dimly lit marriage chamber. In the meantime, the men in the wedding party celebrated for several hours with plenty of food and drink. It is conceivable that Jacob could have been in such a state that he wasn't aware that Leah had taken Rachel's place.

Domestic Tranquility

It seems clear from the narrative that there was considerable tension between Jacob's wives. Do you think that God intends for a man to have multiple wives or does He perhaps just tolerate the practice? **Deuteronomy 21:15-17** states God's instructions for how the husband of more than one wife should behave. Did Jacob follow these instructions?

4. Jacob Builds a Family - 29:32 - 30:24

a) Briefly review the chronology of events that leads to the birth of Jacob's 12 children. What significance do you find in the meanings of any of the children's names?

b) **Genesis 30:14-16** describes an incident involving mandrakes. Find out what you can about these plants and why they were important.

c) Notice the verbal exchange between Leah and Rachel. What does this imply about the relationships between each woman and Jacob? How does it make you feel about Leah?

d) About how long did it take for Jacob to have his 12 children?

5. Jacob Tries Animal Husbandry - 30:25-43

a) After the birth of Joseph, Jacob asked Laban to let him go back home. Why do you think Jacob wanted to leave? What was Laban's response? What do you think were his motivations?

b) Jacob named his price. What was it?

c) Verses 35-36 relate Laban's actions after his agreement with Jacob. What do you think his intent was with these actions?

Selective Breeding

Based on what we know today, the breeding practices followed by Jacob would not necessarily produce the offspring described in this story. However, Jacob was honest and worked hard. So, as He had promised, God blessed Jacob and his flocks grew abundantly. Note that Laban was also blessed through Jacob's success.

d) What did Jacob do and what was the result?

6. Jacob Leaves Laban - 31:1 - 21

a) Describe the events that lead Jacob to begin preparation to return to Canaan. Can you draw any applications to your own life from these events?

b) Why do you think Jacob met Rachel and Leah in the fields to discuss this matter with them? What was he seeking from them? What was their response?

c) Where was Laban when Jacob chose to leave? Do you think he did this on purpose? What crime did Rachel commit before they left? Why do you think she did this?

In-law Problems

The relationship between Jacob and his father-in-law was clearly deteriorating. From Laban's perspective, Jacob had arrived on his doorstep some years earlier with nothing. Now he had amassed wives, children, and large flocks and herds. None of this would have been possible without Laban's help. On the other hand, Jacob had worked hard for everything he had and God had blessed him and Laban both. Laban didn't want to lose the prosperity that he had gained through Jacob and was willing to go to great lengths to prevent this from happening. Jacob, however, had always intended to go back home and God had told him that the time had come. He dreaded the inevitable confrontation with Laban, and waited until he was out of town before quickly packing up his family, flocks and herds and sneaking away. Does this seem consistent with Jacob's character up to this point in his life?

Stolen Household Idols

Why would Rachel want to steal her father's household idols? While she was clearly aware of the God her husband worshiped, she may not have completely forsaken the false gods that she had grown up with and considered them a source of power. Also, she may have harbored some resentment towards her father and saw this as a way to repay him for his mistreatment of her. In either case, this act was unwise at best and may even have been deadly.

Laban confronts Jacob

The confrontation between Laban and Jacob allows each to vent their anger over the way they were treated by the other. In the end, having aired their grievances, Laban and Jacob agree to go their separate ways, each promising not to pass this point to harm the other. *Mizpah*, meaning "watchtower," seems an appropriate name since they are each asking their god to "watch between us." Note that as they swear this covenant to each other they are not necessarily swearing to the same god (verses 51-53).

7. Laban Pursues Jacob - 31:22 - 32:3

a) When did Laban discover that Jacob and his family had fled? What did he do? Where did he catch up with them? What important event happened to Laban on his way?

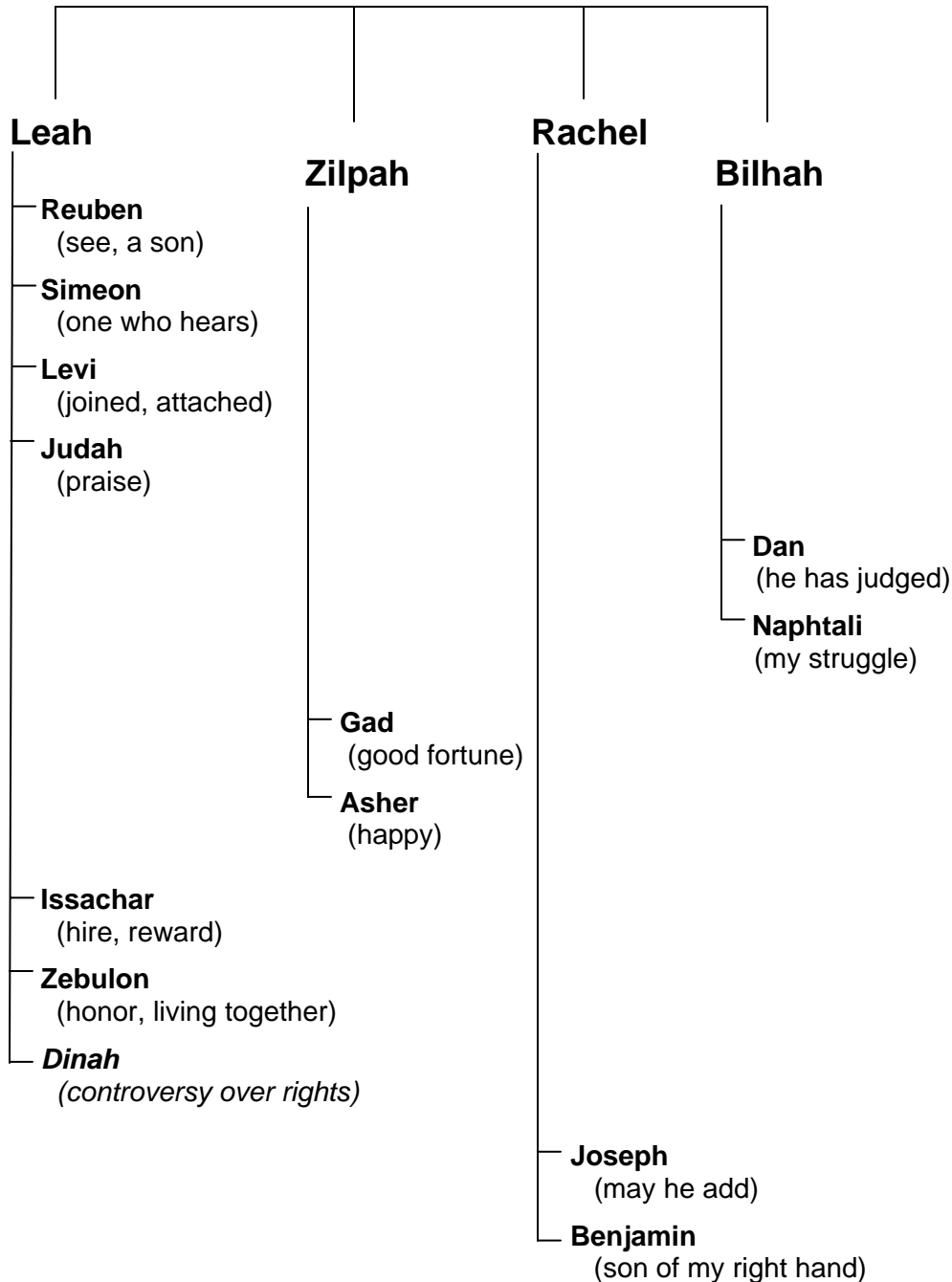
b) Describe the action when Laban overtook Jacob and his family. Do you think Laban had justification for his anger? What do you think angered Laban most?

c) What was Jacob's response to Laban's anger? What was his response to Laban's accusation of theft?

d) After searching Jacob's camp, did Laban find what he was looking for? Why or why not? Analyze the situation that followed and Jacob's words to Laban.

e) After both had expressed their anger and frustration, what did the two men do? Describe the process that they went through to seal their agreement.

Jacob's Family Tree



Jacob's Family

This diagram lists Jacob's wives and concubines showing their respective children along with the meaning of their names. The births are in order as you read down the page. Dinah (whose name is in italics) is the only daughter mentioned in the list of Jacob's children.

Digging deeper

1. Analyze Laban's deception of Jacob. Compare it with Jacob's deception of Isaac.

2. Analyze life from Leah's point of view. Do you think Jacob could have behaved in a more honorable fashion?

3. Analyze Jacob's character based on what we know about him so far. Was he a very admirable person?

For further study, see
Haftarah : Hosea 12:13-14:10
Brit Hadashah : John 1:43-51