



Parasha Vayetze

December 3, 2022

Torah: Genesis 28:10-32:2

Haftarah: Hosea 12:12-14:10

Ketuvim Sh'lichim: John 1:43-51

Shabbat shalom mishpochal! Our *parasha* this week is *Vayetze* meaning “and he left.”
10 Then Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. (Genesis 28:10 TLV). Jacob left his home in Beersheva to travel to the home of his father’s family in Haran to find a wife.

When Jacob arrived in Haran, he met his mother’s niece Rachel, his first cousin, and watered her sheep. He immediately fell in love with her. His uncle, Laban, agreed to give him Rachel in marriage for seven years of tending his sheep, but Laban deceived Jacob and gave him the elder sister, Leah. When Jacob discovered that he had been tricked, he agreed to work another seven years for Rachel’s hand in marriage. Now with two wives, Jacob began to have children. Leah was fertile, but Rachel was barren. Leah bore him Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah. Rachel was impatient and gave him her servant Bilhah who bore him two sons, Dan and Naphtali. Leah became jealous and gave Jacob her servant Zilpah and she bore him two sons, Gad and Asher. Leah again became fertile and bore Jacob Issachar and Zebulun and a daughter, Dinah. Then ADONAI opened Rachel’s womb and she gave birth to Joseph.

Jacob had been in Haran serving Laban for fourteen years and wished to return home, but his uncle persuaded him to stay, offering to pay him sheep in return for his labor. And, Jacob prospered in this arrangement in spite of Laban’s repeated attempts to cheat him. After six more years, Jacob left Haran secretly, fearing that Laban would prevent him from leaving with his family and property. Laban chased after Jacob and caught up with him, but was warned by G-d in a dream not to harm him. Laban and Jacob made a covenant and Jacob named the place *Gal-Ed*, meaning mound of stones, saying, may this be a *mizpah*, a watchtower, between you and me. Jacob left that place and on his way was met by ADONAI’s angels.

At the end of this *parasha*, the twelve tribes are almost complete, only Benjamin has not been born and his birth will take place several years later in Canaan. The other eleven sons of Jacob will both please and disappoint their father. Reuben, the first born will lose his first-born status by sleeping with his father’s concubine Bilhah. When Dinah was raped by Shechem the Hivite, Simeon and Levi tricked him and his father Hamar into circumcising themselves and when they were weak, the two brothers killed all of the men of the city. Then the other brothers came in and looted the town, taking everything of value including the women and children. When Joseph was 17 years old, his older brothers conspired to sell him into slavery. Judah had sex with his daughter in law who disguised herself as a prostitute. These men do not seem to be the best role models to be the leaders of a nation chosen by ADONAI. But, ADONAI’s ways are not our ways. He knows the end before the beginning and knew that these men would repent in the end.

We go back now to an earlier time in our *parasha*, when Jacob was travelling to Haran.
10 Then Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. 11 He happened upon a certain place

and spent the night there, for the sun had set. So he took one of the stones from the place and put it by his head and lay down in that place. (Genesis 28:10-11 TLV). The underlined portion comes from two Hebrew words, *vayifga*, וַיִּפֹּגַע, and *bamakom*, בַּמָּקוֹם. He happened, *vayifga*, upon a certain place, *bamakom*. Jewish *midrashim* tell us that *bamakom* means “the place,” referring to Moriah, which later became known as Jerusalem. I am not a Hebrew scholar, but even I know that is incorrect. *Makom* means “place” and with *ha* meaning “the” added, *hamakom* means “the place.” But, that’s not what this verse says. It says *bamakom*. The preposition *ba* can mean in, at, or by, which means that *bamakom* can mean “in a place, at a place or by a place.” *Bamakom* does not refer to a specific place as does *hamakom*, “the place.” Going back to Genesis 22 when Abraham took Isaac to a certain place to sacrifice him, the word there is *hamakom*, “the place,” and in that case it did refer to the future Jerusalem. But, that is not the case here. Moshe, in writing this verse, specifically wrote *ba* rather than *ha*, meaning “in” rather than the definite article, “the.” This place was a special place, but we don’t know exactly where it is. There is no evidence other than *midrash* and supposition that Jacob spent the night at the future Jerusalem. The second part of the verse says: *So he took one of the stones from the place and put it by his head and lay down in that place*. Here again, the Hebrew, translated as “in that place,” is *bamakom*, בַּמָּקוֹם. It does not designate a special place. There was an ancient town called Bethel located just north of Jerusalem in the tribal territory of Ephraim. Said to be originally called Luz, its modern name is Baytin. While it’s exciting to think of this place where Jacob slept as the future Jerusalem, there is no evidence that it was. It was what happened there that is so important, not where it happened.

Jacob came to a “certain place” and slept there. He dreamed of a ladder connecting heaven and earth, with angels climbing up and down on it. Verse 12: He dreamed, וַיִּחְלֵם, *vayachalom*. 12 *He dreamed: All of a sudden, there was a stairway set up on the earth and its top reaching to the heavens—and behold, angels of God going up and down on it!* (Genesis 28:12 TLV). Then the Hebrew says *vehinneh*, “And behold:” וַיִּהְיֶה, ADONAI, stood above the ladder and promised to Jacob that the land on which he was lying would be given to his descendants. Jacob was afraid and said that this place was *Beit El*, the House of G-d. In the morning, he took the stone by his head and set it up as a monument, promising that ADONAI would be his G-d, that this place would become the House of G-d and that he would give a tenth of everything to Him.

The meaning of the ladder is very important and we will get to it in a moment. But, what ADONAI said in verse 15 is also very important, a promise to both Jacob and his descendants. 15 *“Behold, (1) I am with you, and (2) I will watch over you wherever you go, and (3) I will bring you back to this land, for (4) I will not forsake you until I have done what I promised you.”* (Genesis 28:15 TLV).

- (1) I am *imak*, אִמָּךְ, “with you.”
- (2) I will *usemartika*, וַיִּשְׁמַרְתִּיךָ, “watch over you.”
- (3) And, I will *vahasibotika*, וַיְהַשִּׁיבֶנִי, “bring you back.”
- (4) I will, *lo e'ezabeka*, לֹא אֶעְזָבְךָ, “not forsake you.”

This was ADONAI’s promise to Jacob as he began his journey. ADONAI was with him, watched over him, brought him back and did not forsake him. But, it was not only for Jacob,

but also his descendants. ADONAI promised these four things to the Jews through the centuries wherever they were scattered, a continued fulfillment of the covenant that ADONAI made with Abraham. We see this continuing to unfold today. Israel has reclaimed the land which they lost due to their unfaithfulness to ADONAI. He has given it back to them. But, things are much like they were when they entered it from Egypt. They had to fight for it then and they are having to fight for it now. And, they have feet of clay just like their ancestors. They are human and make mistakes and many even continue to reject ADONAI. But, He has promised and He will fulfill.

Returning to the ladder: *12 He dreamed: All of a sudden, there was a stairway set up on the earth and its top reaching to the heavens—and behold, angels of God going up and down on it!* (Genesis 28:12 TLV). I don't know why TLV used "stairway" rather than ladder, but סִלְמוֹ, *sulam*, does mean ladder. That is the question that so many have asked over the centuries; what is the ladder? Many rabbis have made *midrashim* about these verses. And, truthfully, any explanation, made then or now, could be considered a *midrash* because the deeper meaning is not revealed in the text. Here is what some of the rabbi's believed about the ladder. This portion is not included in your notes, but is in the text on our website, www.beitshalom.us.

Tanhumah (Va-Yetze, 2), is a treatise supposedly written by a *Rabbi Tanhumah* sometime in the Talmudic era between 70 and 640 CE. He views the ladder as signifying the history of mankind, with its rungs representing the kingdoms that ruled the earth, one succeeding another. *Genesis Rabbah* (68,12), a systematic exegesis of the book of Genesis, written in about 450 CE by the *Talmudic* sages, gives another viewpoint. Commenting on it about 600 years later, *Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki*, wrote that the ladder stood on the boundary between the Land of Israel and the Diaspora. He said that: "The angels who escorted Jacob in the Land of Israel do not leave the Land of Israel, but ascend to Heaven, and angels whose domain is outside of the Land of Israel descend to accompany him [further]." A different viewpoint on *Genesis Rabba* (68,12) interprets Jacob's ladder as the ascendancy of an individual to spiritual elevation. These are three very different views. But we're not finished. There are more.

According to *Maimonides, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon*, in his *Guide of the Perplexed* written in 1190, the purpose of the ladder is to explain the relationship between two realities, between existence on earth and existence in the "world of heavenly spheres," both of which are set in motion by God. He believes that when Jacob sees "angels of God" on the ladder, those "going up and down on it" are the prophets who, when they study the ladder, the connection between the two worlds, are elevated to a higher, heavenly level of understanding. He explains that is why it says "going up and down"; first they ascend and become inspired, then they descend and transmit the understanding they acquired to the world. Also, G-d stands on the "ladder." This means that G-d is there constantly, as the Prime Mover, the Cause that governs and is providence over all. Maimonides' conclusion is that the dream is a representation of the two worlds and Jacob, as the person who contemplates the ladder, the connection between the worlds, attains an understanding of God and of His ways in our world. This is a simplification of a very complex explanation, but in the end, Maimonides says that the dream teaches man to attain an understanding of the Deity and to reach the level of prophecy.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the first *Chabad Rebbe*, published *Likkutei Torah* (Numbers, *Naso 2*) in 1837. He wrote that the ladder symbolizes the stages by which

a person ascends in spirituality. That is to say, everything depends on human deeds, ascending as mankind ascends, and descending as mankind descends. One must begin from the bottom and work upwards in prayer, represented by the ladder with its top reaching towards heaven, until it reaches G-d. Consequently, the angels of god ascend and descend in man. Man is the root of all this and becomes spiritually elevated as the human soul is elevated through its adherence to the Living G-d.

Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin published *Nefesh Ha-Chayim* (I.19) in 1820. In it, he interpreted an idea from the *Zohar*, a Kabbalistic work of the 13th century. He said that the vision of the ladder “set on the ground,” does not say “set in the ground,” *ba’aretz*, but towards the ground, *artzah*, to signify that its principal anchoring is in the heavens above, and from there it devolves downward, until it reaches the earth. *Nefesh Ha-Chayim* means “living soul.” He said that the ladder signifies the *neshamah*, the soul in man, descending from above until it finally comes down to this world and into the body of man.

Here we have six different understandings by learned rabbis and there are probably many more that we haven’t explored. Are any of these rabbis correct? I would say not, but their words are looked upon as holy by many. This is not a judgment of their desire to serve ADONAI, but a recognition that these are ideas from the minds of men and not from G-d. The Prophets and the other authors of the *Tanakh* were inspired by the *Ruach*. But, ADONAI did not inspire the Oral *Torah*, the *Mishnah*, the *Talmud* and the *midrashim*. They are the ideas of men, many of which, are claimed to be equal in authority to written *Torah*.

We, today, have an advantage which these *rabbis* did not have. We have a living Messiah whose words are preserved for us as Holy Scripture. After Yeshua was immersed by *Yochanan*, He went to the Galilee and continued calling disciples. The day before, He had called Andrew who brought his brother *Shimon* to Yeshua. Once in the Galilee, He called Philip who then told Nathanael about Him. When Nathanael approached, Yeshua said: 47 ..., “Look, a true Israelite! There’s nothing false in him.” 48 Nathanael said to Him, “How do you know me?” Yeshua answered, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” (John 1:47b-48 TLV). Yeshua knew the hearts of those that He had called, Andrew, Shimon, Philip and now, Nathanael. What is a true Israelite? It is suggested that one of the meanings of “Israel” is “a man seeing G-d.” This would refer to the heart of the man, his mindset with regard to ADONAI. As a true Israelite, Nathanael had a heart for G-d. This understanding of Nathanael’s heart by Yeshua also shows his omniscience, His knowledge of everything. In response to Yeshua’s correct evaluation of what he was doing and also his character, Nathanael said: 49 ..., “You are Ben-Elohim! You are the King of Israel!” (John 1:4 9b TLV). He recognized that only *Ben-Elohim*, the Son of G-d, would know these things. Yeshua’s response was: 50 “Because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree, you believe?” Yeshua replied to him. “You will see greater things than that!” 51 And He said, “Amen, amen I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God going up and coming down on the Son of Man” (John 1:47-50 TLV)!

What do we understand about what Yeshua said to Nathanael? I believe that Yeshua was using the rabbinic principle of *remez*, a method of teaching which was in use during the Second Temple period. Using it, a *rabbi* would hint at a meaning without actually coming out and saying it. He would hint at a Scripture and in doing so would connect what he just said with the Scripture. Yeshua used it frequently. When we read: “Amen, amen I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God going up and coming down on the Son of Man,” Yeshua was hinting at Genesis 28:12 and Jacob’s dream: 12 He dreamed: All of a

sudden, there was a stairway (**sulam, ladder**) set up on the earth and its top reaching to the heavens—and behold, angels of God going up and down on it! (Genesis 28:12 TLV). In Yeshua’s words, “the Son of Man” takes the place of the ladder. In essence, He said: “I am *HaSulam*.” “I am the ladder.” Yeshua used *remez* to hint back at Jacob’s dream, but He also used it a second time to refer to something else. He said that the angels were going up and down on “the Son of Man.” The Son of Man is a title which is used to refer to Yeshua 81 times in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It’s also found in Acts, Hebrews and Revelation. Another interesting thing regarding this title is that the use of the definite article “the” before “Son of Man” is unusual. In Koine Greek, the common Greek of the 1st century, the definite article “the” was not placed before a title; except in the four gospels those 81 times. Yeshua was making a point by referring to Himself as “the Son of Man.” He seemed to be specifically using the words “the Son of Man” as *remez*, to hint back at another Scripture in the *Tanakh*, the Hebrew Bible. “Son of man” or “the son of man” is actually found 107 times in the *Tanakh*. In Judaism, neither of these two terms is used to refer to the Messiah and those in Ezekiel refer to Ezekiel, himself. But it is obvious that Yeshua is using it to refer to Himself and the most likely place to which He is referring is Daniel chapter 7.

Daniel said: 9 “*While I was watching, thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His garment was as white as snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, its wheels a burning fire. 10 A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him. Thousands of thousands attended Him and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened*” (Daniel 7:9-10 TLV). These verses are a picture of *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. The books refer to the Book of Life and the Book of Death; either you made it or you didn’t. Daniel continues: 13 “*I was watching in the night visions. Behold, One, like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days, and was brought into His presence. 14 Dominion, glory and sovereignty were given to Him that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will never pass away, and His kingdom is one that will not be destroyed*” (Daniel 7:13-14 TLV). The Hebrew does say “a son of man,” showing that this individual approaching ADONAI was in the form of a man. Yeshua referred to Himself as “the Son of Man,” to show that He was “the son of man” pictured in this verse. These verses are also unique. As far as I know, this is the only place in the *Tanakh* where we find ADONAI, the Father, and the Son pictured together. ADONAI, the Ancient of Days, gave the authority to reign, sovereignty, to His Son. Thrones, plural, were set up, meaning that a throne was set up for the Son of Man, Yeshua. 22 *He has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels and authorities and powers subjected to Him.* (1Peter 3:22 TLV). ADONAI gave Him dominion, judgmental authority. (See also Acts 2:33 and Hebrews 8:1 about Yeshua at ADONAI’s right hand).

What does all this mean? When Yeshua said “*Amen, amen I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God going up and coming down on the Son of Man*”, he was responding to Nathaniel’s statement: “*Rabbi, You are Ben-Elohim! You are the King of Israel!*” “Rabbi, You are the Son of G-d.” “Rabbi, You are the King of Israel.” Yeshua said: “Nathaniel, You’re right! And you’re going to see me in my full revelation. You will see me as the King of everything and the Judge of the living and the dead. The angels going up and down are heavenly messengers who obey me and carry out my commands to minister to those who love and fear me.” Yeshua was making the statement that He was the One whom the Father had given authority over everything. He, Himself, was the *sulam*, the ladder to heaven. The way from earth to heaven is by way of the ladder, Yeshua, Himself.

As the spiritual ladder of life activated by His sacrifice on the cross, Yeshua is the way, the only way, to the Father Who is in heaven. He said: 6 ..., “*I am the way, the truth, and the life! No one comes to the Father except through Me.*” (John 14:6b TLV). In saying that He is “the way,” He is also saying that He is *HaSulam*, “the ladder.” Yeshua provides the only ladder which can allow us to reach the Father and eternal life. When Jacob awoke following his dream, he was afraid and said: 17 ..., “*How fearsome this place is! This is none other than the House of God—this must be the gate of heaven!*” I don’t believe that that actual place was the gate of heaven, but we could make the case that the *sulam*, the ladder is *שַׁעַר הַשָּׁמַיִם*, *sa’ar hashamayim*, the gate of heaven. In reality, Yeshua is the *sa’ar hashamayim*, the “gate of heaven,” the only way to the Father. We did not make the rules, He did. Our hearts ache for those who die without Yeshua today. But, many Jews have trusted Yeshua today. There is good news. Joel Rosenberg, in his special Thanksgiving *Rosenberg Report* on TBN, said that “... there are now approximately 1 million Jews in the world today who believe that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, the Son of God.” He goes on to say that this is the largest number of Jewish believers in Jesus ever and most of them are in the United States. He also said that the number of Jewish believers in Israel has grown to 30,000 and that there is revival there among the Jews. I’ll put the report in our next email for you to read. But, there is also bad news. In another report, the Office for National Statistics in England found that 46.2% of the English and Welsh population labeled themselves as “Christian” in 2021, which is a 13.1% drop since 2011 when 59.3% said they were Christian. In 2001, nearly 72% said they were Christians, showing a total drop of 26% in just twenty years. It is almost that bad here in the United States. We must have revival.

Even though we, ourselves, have not fallen away, we must be concerned about our relationship with Yeshua as well. Unless we go beyond the *Besorah*, the Good News about salvation, we are not being fully obedient to Yeshua’s commands to us. He is calling us to be more than “just saved,” more than just receiving the promise of eternal life. Are we being faithful followers if we try to get by with the least that we can? We must go the second mile and beyond and seek to be all that we can for Him. He wants us to be His *talmidim*, His disciples. And, we can’t be a disciple without personal cost. It requires study, commitment and devotion to G-d. It is not just for the few, but for everyone who calls upon the name of Yeshua.

We are the body of Messiah, Yeshua’s *ecclesia*, His worldwide assembly of believers. This group is made up of both Jew and Gentile who have been grafted into *Sha’ul*’s olive tree, a graphic picture of the Israel of Messiah. Whether we are Jew or Gentile, we are both grafted in; Jews being grafted back into their own tree and Gentiles the wild olive branches grafted into the Jewish tree. And, let’s not forget that there is also a greater Israel, the Commonwealth of Israel, which includes everyone who has a spiritual relationship with ADONAI. Those of us who follow Yeshua are in it and the other Jews of the world are as well. ADONAI is in covenant with them through an everlasting covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant. Today, they are pre-believers, Jews who have not yet trusted in Yeshua, but soon will when “all Israel” is saved as *Sha’ul* tells us in Romans 11.

The majority of the people of the United States and the world have a terrible disease, a fatal disease. It is humanism, an insidious disease. It has crept upon us in the United States slowly from the time of the founding of our nation, but is spreading today at a alarming rate. It is fatal because those who have it have no hope beyond their life on earth. It is affecting those who have fallen away from Yeshua’s body as well as those who have never been a part of His body. We need revival. We must have revival! Today, the *Ruach HaKodesh* is speaking

about revival to believers throughout the body of Messiah. Revival is coming and we will be a part of it, we and all of Messianic Judaism. One of our *mishpacha* recently had a vision of a giant sleeping in a field of flowers. One of his shoulders began to twitch. The sleeping giant is the great revival which is coming and we, as a part of Messianic Judaism are a part of it. We have to do our part. We can't be "just get by" followers of Yeshua. Are you a "just get by" follower? He has called us to a higher calling. *Sha'ul* exhorts us: *14 I press on toward the goal for the reward of the upward calling of God in Messiah Yeshua. 15 Therefore let all who are mature have this attitude; and if you May we all have the "mature attitude," but if we don't, may ADONAI reveal to each of us our attitude which is not in line with His definition of maturity. Shabbat shalom!*