

PARASHAT VAYETZE

Genesis 28:10–32:3

Vayetze means “and he went out” and relates the story of Jacob’s departure from Beer-sheba for distant Haran, Rebekah’s birthplace. The first night of his journey, he dreams of a stairway reaching from earth to heaven and is told by God that his descendants will be blessed and that they will inherit the land already promised to Abraham and Isaac. After a long journey, Jacob arrives in Haran where he is welcomed by Rebekah’s brother Laban and his two daughters, Leah and Rachel. Laban promises to allow Rachel to marry Jacob if he will work seven years for him. When it comes time for the marriage, Laban deceives Jacob by sending Leah to his tent. When Jacob protests, Laban tells him that, if he will serve another seven years, then he will also give him Rachel. Jacob agrees. With his two wives and their maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah, he has twelve children: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah with Leah; Dan and Naphtali with Bilhah; Gad and Asher with Zilpah; and Joseph with Rachel. After working many years for Laban, Jacob decides to return to his homeland. He works out an agreement with Laban for payment of his wages. They will divide the herd. Jacob will be given all the spotted and speckled sheep and goats; Laban will keep the rest. Laban agrees, but, when Jacob’s herd increases in numbers, Laban’s sons accuse Jacob of cheating them. Fearing trouble, Jacob decides to leave secretly with all his family and cattle. Laban pursues him, but, when he overtakes him, they share their grievances and reconcile their differences. Afterwards, Jacob and his family continue on their way.
