

# TORAH PORTIONS

## Parashat Vayetzei

THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTION

### GENESIS 28:10-32:3

#### Parashat Vayetzei / פַּרְשַׁת וַיֵּצֵא

##### In this week's guide...

The **COMMENTARY** takes an honest look at the characters in this *parsha*. Frankly, they're miserable (at times). Anger and accusation fly! Who's unwanted. Who's deceiving and scheming. Who's sneaking around. What a mess. But what if we could glean wisdom by inverting the dysfunction? What if we looked at this brokenness and found a way forward by doing the opposite? This is a practical and challenging article..... 1

Our **NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN** will have you scrounging around the attic (or eBay) for your Walkman and favorite neon t-shirt. That's right, we're going "back" to the '80s. And we're *not* talking about the 5780s—the 1980s! A Spielberg blockbuster and its soundtrack's hit single provide a fun, yet profound context for looking at a love story in this week's *parsha*. Oh, and if you ever struggle with impatience, this piece will be encouraging!..... 2

And the **HEBREW WORD STUDY** takes us to the "final" scene between Jacob and his father-in-law, Laban. Their tensions come to a head as they decide to make a covenant together, with God being invoked as the enforcer of its terms. Wow! These two men each named the location where all of this occurred and our examination of one of the names opens up new insights into God's character and our calling..... 4

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##### OVERVIEW

Abraham's only son, Isaac, gave birth to twin sons. The younger twin, Jacob, wreaked so much havoc that he had to flee for fear of his life, hence the name of this Torah portion (*Vayetzei* is Hebrew for "and he left"). In this portion we read about Jacob's transition to a husband (of two women) and father (of twelve sons). His leaving brought him to his uncle Laban and much prosperity, but also more drama.

## FUSION GLOBAL WITH RABBI JASON

Weekly Torah Portion – *Parashat Vayetzei* / פרשת ויצא

**Genesis 28:10-32:3**

### COMMENTARY

by Staff Contributor

#### *Let's do a little exercise.*

In your mind, think of someone that you characterize as “happy.” Of course, this person doesn’t have to be happy at this given moment or season. But generally, this person has a cheerful disposition and outlook. Next, think of someone unhappy. Similarly, this person may have some good moments. But generally, this person is sour most of the time.

Both happy and unhappy people have struggles and challenges in their lives. So, it’s not their circumstances that make them happy or unhappy. Therefore, it must be something else. But what is it? What is it that establishes a person’s outlook and manner?

By observing just about every one of the main characters in this week’s *parsha*, we can see behaviors and characteristics that cultivate “unhappy” lives. And by looking at both of these elements, we can learn a lot about features that lead to happy and unhappy lives.

Here in *Parashat Vayetzei*, plain and simple, there are some miserable people: *Jacob* is unhappy because he gets outswindled by *Laban*—a taste of his own medicine. He’s also unhappy (and understandably so) because he ends up with the wrong wife (and then multiple wives).

*Leah* is unhappy because she is insecure and feels unloved by *Jacob*.

*Rachel* is unhappy because she is barren and jealous of her sister.

Both *Leah* and *Rachel* are unhappy because of their rivalry.

*Laban* is unhappy when he finds that *Jacob* stealthily leaves town with his daughters and their possessions.

We have a wagon full of unhappy people in this *parsha*! And as a result, there is a lot of painful drama and heartache. We don’t know how to size up each of these characters as “unhappy” or “happy” in their general dispositions. But based on the information we have in the Torah, it’s fair to suggest that *Jacob*, *Laban*, *Rachel*, and *Leah* were not the happiest people most of the time. This brings me back to my “What is it?” question. Why are some of these characters “happy people” and others “not so much”?

Leaning on God, following *Yeshua*-Jesus, and keeping God’s commandments certainly can and should serve as the foundation for happy lives. But many people do those things and are still not very happy. For example, all the characters in *Parashat Vayetzei* were religious on some level. But they still appear to be unhappy.



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Recently, I saw a little blurb from author James Clear<sup>i</sup> that was so simple but true regarding “How to be unhappy” and “How to be happy.” According to James Clear, if you want to be *unhappy*, do the following:

- *stay inside all-day*
- *move as little as possible*
- *spend more than you earn*
- *take yourself and life too seriously*
- *look for reasons why things won't work*
- *always consume and never contribute*
- *resent successful people*
- *never say hello first*
- *be unreliable*

To pick on Laban for a moment, he was the kind of guy who seemed to have a pattern of consuming but not contributing. He was also unreliable. The *parsha* says that Laban changed Jacob's wages a hundred times. I bet Laban was a miserable person.

Well, let's finish up with the opposite list. If you want to be a happy person, you do the opposite of what unhappy people do.



- *you get outside every day*
- *you move, walk, exercise, and dance*
- *you spend less than you earn*
- *you view life as play*
- *you are the one who looks for solutions*
- *you develop a bias to contribute and create*
- *you celebrate the success of others*
- *you are the first to say hello*
- *you are reliable*

This week, let's focus on being happy people while acknowledging that we all have understandably unhappy moments. People who have *Yeshua* and live faithfully according to God's Word have an anchor that positions them for happiness. But to live a life of consistent satisfaction and contentment, we must also consciously practice “happy habits.”

## NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN

*by Staff Contributor*

The '80s is a popular theme for the Fusion Tribe. Of course, we typically use that term in reference to the current decade on the Jewish calendar (the 5780s). But this week, let's go back to the other '80s—the decade of Michael Jackson, Ronald Reagan, and MTV. First, we need to dust off two iconic cultural references: a Steven Spielberg movie and a song from its soundtrack. I'm talking about *Back to the Future* and *The Power of Love* by Huey Lewis and the News. Don't worry, these references aren't so complicated that they'll be lost on you if you're unfamiliar with them. The movie is about time travel, and the song is about, well, the power of love. This is pop culture at its finest, folks, not the opera.





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## Parashat Vayetzai

This week's *parsha* brings both themes (the relativity of time and the effects of love) into focus. You know the story without even reading it. Abraham's grandson, the supplanter Jacob, was on the run after deceiving Isaac and robbing his twin brother Esau of the patriarchal blessing. He ended up with his uncle Laban. Their initial exchange is now infamous:

Laban said to him, "Surely you are my own bone and flesh." And he stayed with him for a month. Then Laban said to Jacob, "Should you, my relative, serve me for nothing? Tell me, what should your wages be?"

Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were delicate, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. **Jacob was in love with Rachel**, so he said, "Let me serve you for seven years for Rachel your younger daughter."

Laban said, "It's better that I give her to you than I give her to another man! Stay with me." – Genesis 29:14-19 (*emphasis added*)

There would be no wedding until Jacob completed seven years of labor for Laban. Surprisingly, Jacob not only offered Laban these terms—he fulfilled them honestly! Until this point in his story, Jacob was always scheming, but having met Rachel, he made a radical "about-face." How did this savvy man, who strategically acquired the birthright AND the blessing from Esau, manage to abide by his agreement with Laban patiently? The Torah tells us in verse twenty: "So Jacob worked for Rachel seven years, yet in his eyes it was like a few days, because of his love for her."

Jacob's endurance reveals the power, *not* of determination, but of love! We recently studied the Hebrew word for "love" (*ahav*) in our weekly Torah Portion Guide. This concept is much more pervasive than mere emotional stirrings. Emotional affection is terrific, but that is not what sustained Jacob for seven years of labor. In contrast, **biblical love is catalytic**. This sort of love is transformational. It is a spark that ignites the fire of doing good. This love is a root that yields the "Kingdom produce" by which others will know our tree. Godly love is the greatest "force" in the universe. It is the foundation of the abundant life *Yeshua* offers. It will "remain." Hence, the Apostle Paul insisted, "For in Messiah Yeshua, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any meaning—but only trust and faithfulness expressing itself through love" (Galatians 5:6 *emphasis added*).



*Jacob and Rachel at the Well* by Luca Giordano (c. 1690)

One of the remarkable things about the power of this kind of love is its effect on how we relate to time. Notice that because of Jacob's love for Rachel, those seven years of labor "was like a few days"! John Chrysostom (the great preacher and bishop of the 4th century) commented on this fact that "his great love reduced the labor and the period of time."<sup>ii</sup> It should be evident that love did not reduce the time technically but *experientially*. In other words, Jacob's love did not change time as much as how he experienced it.

The same can be true for our lives of faith today. Following *Yeshua* doesn't exempt us from hardship ("seven years of labor"). In his epistle, the Apostle Peter encouraged believers struggling with the delay of *Yeshua*'s return in the face of false teachers and pervasive evil. He was writing to restore their focus, to "stir you up by way of a reminder" (2 Peter 3:1).

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And a little bit later, Peter sought to encourage their patience, “don’t forget this one thing, loved ones, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day” (v. 8). Notice how similar the sentiment is to Jacob’s! The claim that seven years felt like “a few days” to Jacob reveals the worth of Rachel. How much more precious is *Yeshua* if waiting for a millennium will feel like a single day to those who love Him? Perhaps this is why Peter began this same epistle directing the believers:

“Making every effort, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly love; **and to brotherly love, love.**” (2 Peter 1:5-7 *emphasis added*)

### HEBREW WORD STUDY: *tzafah* (תָּצַף) / to keep watch

by Staff Contributor

It’s not uncommon for parents in contemporary Western to select names for their kids based on “sound.” We often choose a name because it’s pretty, strong, or unique *sounding*. Seemingly less so do people consider a name’s meaning during the naming process. Things could not have been more different in the world of the Bible. *Parashat Vayetzei*’s account of Leah naming her sons is a prime example of the approach to names in the Ancient Near East.

This intentionality also applied to places. For example, Laban pursued Jacob following his sneaky departure from the clan. After a confrontation, Laban and Jacob resolved the crisis by making a covenant (another Hebrew word we studied last week). This covenantal act involved gathering stones, eating, and naming the location.

So they took the stones and made a pile. Then they ate there on the pile. Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha and Jacob called it Gal-ed. (Genesis 31:46b-47)

One Jewish scholar elaborated on this dual name, “The international character of the transaction is nicely caught in Laban the Aramean’s use of an Aramaic term while Jacob uses Hebrew.”<sup>iii</sup> What follows is a curious sort of renaming:

And Laban said, “This pile is a witness between me and you today.” That is why its name is Gal-ed, or Mizpah, for he said, “Let *ADONAI* keep watch between you and me when we are out of one another’s sight.” (Genesis 31:48-49)

The name “Mizpah” reflected the covenantal condition of God “keeping watch” between Laban and Joshua. As Messianic theologian Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum points out, “Many have taken this to be a benediction to be applied to oneself when separated from a girlfriend, boyfriend, husband, or wife, etc. However, in the original meaning in context, this was not a benediction but a warning, a warning between two men who could not trust each other.”<sup>iv</sup> The English phrase “keep watch” is critical. It is a translation of the Hebrew word *tzafah* (תָּצַף). Its triconsonantal root is:

- צ / *tzadi* (90)
- פ / *peh* (80)
- ה / *hey* (5)





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archaeological site (in Benjamin / Israel) commonly identified with Mizpah

The connection between *tzafah* and *Mizpah* is seen in the Hebrew spelling of the latter: **מִצְפָּה**. Those “final” three consonants in *Mizpah* are the tri-consonantal root of *tzafah*. In the context of Jacob and Laban, the Lord was to serve actively as the One who would “keep watch” (lit. *yitzef* / יִצֵּף). It’s worth noting that certain Hebrew consonants take a different shape when used as the final letter in a word. Hence, the soft *peh* (or “*feh*”) that ends *yitzef* looks different than those used in previous instances.

Examining the use of *tzafah* in the Bible gives us a glimpse into God’s character and our potential. Its appearance in this week’s *parsha* reveals the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to be intimately and personally involved in the lives of His people. These two men could rely on God to be present and aware of their situation. Likewise, we can rest in the fact that God is still keeping watch over us in the most personal ways. But part of what contributes to the greatness of our God is that He is not only present on a personal scale—He is the sovereign ruler of the nations! Psalm 66:7 declares,

He rules by His might forever.  
His eyes keep watch [*titzpeinah* / תִּצְפֶּינָה] on the  
nations. Let no rebels exalt themselves. *Selah*

Finally, God is not the only one capable of keeping watch. This is a sacred act for God’s people, which positions them to participate in prophetic work. As we read in Habakkuk 2:1 (NASB),

I will stand at my guard post  
And station myself on the watchtower;  
And I will keep watch [*atzappeh* / אֲצַפֶּה] to see what He will say to me,  
And how I may reply when I am reprimanded.

Perhaps this reliably watchful attentiveness that we see in God is available to us. As the Apostle Peter noted, “He has given us His precious and magnificent promises, so that through them you may become **partakers of the divine nature**, since you have escaped the corruption that evil desires have brought into the world” (*emphasis added*).

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *Tree of Life Version*.

Rabbi Jason & Fusion Global present  
**HEBREW WORD STUDY**

צָפָה

צָפָה / **tzafah** : vb. **look out or about, watch**. This conveys the idea of being fully aware of a situation in order to gain some advantage or keep from being surprised by an enemy.

The verb appears in the sense “to lie watching in ambush”; the wicked watches the righteous to slay him (Ps 37:32). Conversely the wise woman watches (looks to) the ways of her household (Prov 31:27). So too [ADONAI] is alert to what happens on earth in order that he may properly judge its inhabitants (Prov 15:3). It also expresses the posture of faith; Micah says, “As for me, I will look to [ADONAI], I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me” (7:7).

taken from the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

[fusionglobal.org](http://fusionglobal.org)

### THOUGHTS for REFLECTION

Take some time this week to prayerfully consider and discuss with friends:

- Our Commentary is both encouraging AND challenging! The good news is, you can be happy. The “challenging” news is that this happiness is going to require some effort on our part. Review the “opposite of unhappy people” list. Which of those practices are you least inclined to do? Why not tackle them this week?
- This week’s Hebrew Word Study could also be seen as a “call to action.” In this case, the action would be (to keep) watching for the Lord, a la Habakkuk. The trouble is, as you know, focus. In a day of ever-decreasing attention spans, the call to watch for the Lord is a serious challenge! Do you find *tzafah* in your spiritual life easy or difficult? Have you discovered any practices or disciplines that have made your efforts to “keep watch” more effective?

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Parashat Vayetzai

**NEXT WEEK'S READINGS:** *Parashat Vayishlach* / פרשת וישלח

## TORAH

Sunday / Genesis 32:4-13

Monday / Genesis 32:14-30

Tuesday / Genesis 32:31-33:5

Wednesday / Genesis 33:6-20

Thursday / Genesis 34:1-35:11

Friday / Genesis 35:12-36:19

Saturday / Genesis 36:20-43

**Prophetic Reading (*Haftarah*):** Obadiah 1:1 - 1:21

**New Covenant Reading:** Matthew 2:13-23

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<sup>i</sup> “3-2-1: On Building Better Habits, Focusing on the Process, and Optimism,” *James Clear*, last modified October 18, 2022, accessed November 22, 2022, <https://jamesclear.com/3-2-1/december-5-2019>.

<sup>ii</sup> Mark Sheridan, ed., [Genesis 12–50](#), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 196.

<sup>iii</sup> Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, vol. 1 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 117.

<sup>iv</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, [Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis](#), 1st ed. (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2008), 473.