

Vayetze

Parashat Vayetze: [Genesis 28:10-32:3](#)

Haftarah: [Hosea 12:13-14:10](#)

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Fleeing his brother and looking for a wife, Jacob is on his way to Haran when he stops to rest. With a stone for a pillow, he dreams about angels going up and down on a ladder, and when he awakes he says, “Truly, God is in this place, and I did not know it” (Genesis 28:16).

We read Jacob’s words as a heartfelt sentiment about recognizing the presence of God. He wakes up to the knowledge that God is not only found in Isaac’s tent, but wherever Jacob is as well. It is at this moment that God becomes the God of Jacob, and not only the God of Abraham and Isaac.

Jacob wakes up declaring his certainty in God’s presence—and yet, is he certain? He has had a profound spiritual experience, but he does not emerge from it with faith in God; he demands proof.

Jacob makes a deal with God. He says that only once certain conditions are met will Adonai be his God, vowing, “If God is with me and watches over me on this path that I am taking and gives me bread to eat and clothes to wear, and if I return safely to my father’s house, then will Adonai be my God” (Genesis 28:20-21).

Perhaps Jacob should have said, “Truly, God is in this place, and I still don’t know what that means.”

Despite recognizing that God is with him, in that place, Jacob is not changed by the experience. He promises to set up a place of worship—when and if God delivers—and he continues on his way. Jacob remains the child who was handed everything, and as such he expects God to continue handing him blessings; his faith is based on what he gets. Jacob stumbles on God when he is not even looking and still does not appreciate the spiritual experience he had. God is in this place, and Jacob still doesn’t quite get it.

We know how the story ends. We know that the next time Jacob has a dream he is changed by the experience—instead of emerging with demands he will have a new name. We’re not there yet, but the rest of this week’s portion tells us how Jacob gets to that point where he is ready to be changed.

For as Jacob continues on his journey, for the first time is met with hardship. He has to work for someone else, someone who is not always honest in his dealings. He is tricked

into marrying the sister of the woman he loves. He has a difficult time fathering a child with his favorite wife. Even so—as he matures, so does his faith in God. He learns that his faith cannot be contingent upon receiving blessings. Even in places and situations where he expects it least, he can find God.

Jacob wakes from this first dream knowing that God was there but not sure what to do about it. Sometimes we encounter God and are unchanged. From Jacob we learn that recognizing that God is in this place is only a part of our relationship with God.