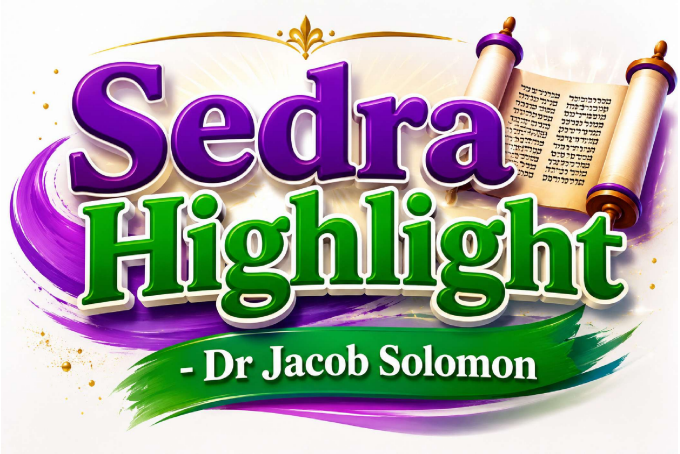



## VAYEITZEI

*"I worked for 20 years in your household; 14 years for your two daughters and 6 years for your flocks, and you changed the terms of my wages 10 times over! Had G-d not been with me... you would have sent me away penniless" (31:41-42).*

Business Studies 101. Parashat Vayeitzei, Ya'akov and Lavan. All smiles and promises at the start. Welcome to your uncle's home and household. But over the next few weeks, the lavish hospitality would slowly decay into servitude and exploitation. Agreements would turn out to be riddled with hidden loopholes that deceitfully exploit the weak bargaining power of the newcomer dependent on his powerful relative. The terms of service and wage agreements drawn up would be deceitfully massaged, bit by bit. The employer, finding himself in - er - 'unforeseen adverse circumstances', would subtly manipulate the clauses to favour himself at the worker's expense. All flowing from the imbalance of power between employer and employee, exacerbated by the parties being related to one another. Familiar?

And when finally on the run with his wives and children and his wages in kind - all of which Lavan claimed were his sole property - G-d intervenes and redresses the balance. He protects Ya'akov as he warns the hotly-pursuing Lavan to say nothing to Ya'akov; nothing good, nothing bad. Those words did what they had to do - restrain Lavan, and protect Ya'akov.

We as Am Yisrael take our title from Ya'akov Avinu, whose name in due course G-d would change to Yisrael. Ya'akov's vulnerability in Lavan's household anticipates the vulnerability of his descendants under powers whose promises and protection cannot always be trusted. Ya'akov's distinction is that he was twice out of Eretz Yisrael and each was for a long period. Twice, on the run. First time on the run from Eisav, second time on the run from famine (though he had Yosef to look forward to). On both occasions, G-d gave him an unexpected word on his exit route out of the Land. With the ladder en route to Charan in Mesopotamia, He promised "I will take care of you wherever you go" (28:15). Many years later, in the depths of the night vision, He reassured his fears with "Do not fear going down to Egypt as

**it is there that I will make you into a great nation. I Myself will go down to Egypt with you" (46:3-4). The first time Ya'akov was startled: "Behold G-d is here in this place, and I never knew" (28:16). The second time we don't hear of him being startled at all. By that time, we could say, he knew that whether he was on holy territory or not, G-d was always with him. For he had seen that for himself when G-d stepped into Lavan's plans to cheat him out of all he had - and as the Pesach Hagada implies, very much worse: to save Ya'akov and his children from complete eradication.**

**Like Ya'akov Avinu, Am Yisrael had been away from Eretz Yisrael for long, long, periods. Yet as a people we did not disappear as other conquered and vanquished nations. Like Ya'akov Avinu, He is with us wherever we are. Many terrible things happened, we don't always know for certain why. Yet Am Yisrael Chai: our people continue to live, as did Ya'akov Avinu, though the darkest trials and tribulations.**