

Parashat Vayetzei Texts

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Biblical text, Parashat Vayetzei, Genesis 28:10-22¹

10 Jacob went out from Be'er Sheva and came to Haran. 11 He lighted upon a place and spent the night there because the sun had set. Taking from the stones of the place, he put [one] under his head and lay down at that spot.

12 He had a dream. A ladder was stuck in the ground, and its top was reaching to the sky. And, behold, angels of God were ascending and descending on it! 13 And, behold, the Eternal One was standing on it. And He said, "I am the Eternal One, God of Abraham your ancestor and God of Isaac. The ground on which you are lying I will give to you and your seed. 14 Your progeny shall be as the dust of the earth. You shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south. Through you and through your progeny shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 And, behold, I am with you and shall guard you wherever you go. I shall bring you back to this land, not leaving you until I have [finished] doing [exactly] what I said to you."

16 Jacob awakened from his sleep and said, "Surely God is in this place, and I did not know [it]." 17 Greatly afraid he said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gateway to the heavens!" 18 Getting up early in the morning, he took the stone which he had placed under his head and made it [into] an upright monument. Then he poured oil upon its top.

19 He called the name of that place, Beth-El. However, Luz was its original name.

20 Then Jacob vowed a vow: "If God will be with me and guard me on the way on which I go; if [God] gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear; 21 if [God] brings me back to my ancestral home in peace...then the Eternal One shall be my God. 22 And this stone which I made [into] a monument shall be God's house, and everything You give to me, I will definitively give You [back] ten percent!"

Midrashim from B'reishit Rabbah²

68:5 AND JACOB WENT OUT.

Hezekiah said: Our father Jacob was sixty-three years old when he received the blessings³; and he spent another fourteen years secluded in the Land and studying

¹ Biblical passage translated by Rabbi Howard Kosovski.

² Translation from Soncino *Midrash Rabbah*, CD-Rom version.

³ V. Meg. 17a.

under Eber⁴; a further seven years were spent by him in working for the matriarchs. Thus he married at the age of eighty-four, whereas Esau married at the age of forty. Thus we learn that the Holy One, blessed be He, hastens [the happiness of] the wicked and delays that of the righteous.

68:9 AND HE LIGHTED (VAYYIFGA) UPON THE PLACE (28:11). VAYYIFGA ' connotes prayer.⁵

R. Joshua b. Levi said: Our patriarchs instituted the three [daily] services. Abraham instituted morning prayer, for it says, *And Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Eternal One* (Gen. 19:27): now standing refers to prayer, as it says, *Then stood up Phinehas, and prayed* (Ps. 106:30).⁶ Isaac instituted afternoon prayer, as it says, *And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening* (Gen. 24:63): meditation connotes prayer, as it says, *I pour out my meditation before Him* (Ps. 142:3); similarly, *I will meditate and supplicate,⁷ and God heard my voice* (ib. 55:18). Jacob instituted evening prayer, as it says, AND HE LIGHTED (WAY-YIFGA) UPON THE PLACE. Now *pegi'ah* refers to prayer, as it says, *Neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession (tifga) to Me* (Jer. 7:16).

R. Samuel b. Nahman said: [The three services] correspond to the three changes in the day.⁸ In the evening prayer one should pray, 'May it be Your will, O Eternal, my God, to bring me forth from darkness into light'; in the morning prayer one should say, 'I give thanks unto You, O Eternal my God, for bringing me forth from darkness into light'; in the afternoon prayer one should pray, 'May it be Your will, O Eternal my God, that as You have suffered me to see the rising of the sun, so will You suffer me to see its setting.'

The Rabbis said: [The services were instituted] to correspond to the daily offerings. The morning service corresponds to the daily morning sacrifice; the afternoon service corresponds to the daily afternoon sacrifice; but the evening service does not correspond to anything. R. Tanhuma said: Even the evening service corresponds, viz. to the limbs and fat which were consumed in fire on the altar during the night.

Talmudic passages

A ladder was stuck in the ground, and its top was reaching to the sky. (Gen. 28:12)

⁴ According to tradition Shem and Eber founded a college for the study of the Torah. Gen. XXVI, 34.

⁵ Cur. ed. add: in the place of prayer, which is the Temple.

⁶ E.V. 'And wrought judgment.'

⁷ E.V. *complain and moan.*

⁸ From darkness to light, from light to darkness, and the intermediate stage of the afternoon.

It was taught: How wide was the ladder? It was eight thousand parasangs [*parsaot*], as it is written: "And behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it." The word "ascending [*olim*]," written in plural, indicates that there were two angels ascending simultaneously. Likewise, the term "and descending [*veyordim*]," also in the plural, indicates that two angels were descending simultaneously. And when they met one another they were a total of four in one place, so the ladder must have been wide enough to accommodate four angels.

And it is written in a verse with regard to an angel: "*His body was like Tarshish*" (Daniel 10:6). And it is learned as a "tradition that the city of Tarshish was two thousand parasangs. Consequently, in order to accommodate four angels, the ladder must have been eight thousand parasangs wide.⁹

A ladder was stuck in the ground, and its top was reaching to the sky. And, behold, angels of God were ascending and descending on it! (Gen 28:12-13)

The Holy One showed Jacob the angelic princes of the four kingdoms¹⁰ ascending and descending.

And, behold, the Eternal One was standing on it [translating "on it" as "on him"]. (Gen. 28:13)

It was taught that the angels were ascending and gazing at the image of [*bidyokeno*] Jacob above, engraved on the Throne of Glory, and descending and gazing at his image below. The angels subsequently became jealous of Jacob, and wanted to endanger his life. Immediately Jacob received divine protection, as the verse states: "And behold, the Lord stood over him" (Genesis 28:13). Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish says: Were it not written in a verse it would be impossible to utter it in deference to God, since it describes God as standing over Jacob to protect him from the angels like a man who waves a fan over his son to cool him down.¹¹

"The ground on which you are lying I will give to you and your seed." (Gen. 28:13)

R. Isaac said: The verse implies that the Holy-One folded up the entire Land of Israel and put it under our father Jacob, as if to say to him that it will be easily conquered by his children.¹²

⁹ B. Hul. 91b. Translation from Sefaria.

¹⁰ Babylon, Media, Greece, and Rome, the four kingdoms among whom the Jewish people were to be exiled.

¹¹ B. Hul. 91. Translation from Sefaria.

¹² B. Hul. 91b: Yalkut, *Va-yetze*, section 119.