Torah Portion of Vayeitze

“Ya’akov and Going Out”

by Avi Neuman

The sources are presented in the order they are mentioned in the essay.

Genesis 28:10-15

10. And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran.
11. And he lighted upon a certain place, and remained there all night, because the sun
was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay
down in that place to sleep.
12. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to
heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.
13. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said,  I am the Lord God of Abraham your
father, and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, to you will I give it, and to your
seed;
14. And your seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the
west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south; and in you and in your seed shall
all the families of the earth be blessed.
15. And, behold, I am with you, and will keep you in all places where you go, and will
bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you, until I have done that about which I
have spoken to you.
Rashi Genesis 28:11

And he arrived at the place Scripture does not mention which place, but [it means] the place mentioned elsewhere, which is Mount Moriah, concerning which it is said (Gen. 22:4):“And he saw the place from afar.” [From Pes. 88a]

And he arrived Heb. וּפֶגֶע, as in (Josh. 16:7):“and it reached (וּפֶגֶע) Jericho”; (ibid. 19:11):“and it reached (וּפֶגֶע) Dabbesheth.” Our Rabbis (Gen. Rabbah 88:9, Ber. 26b) interpreted it [the word וּפֶגֶע] as an expression of prayer, as in (Jer. 7:16):“And do not entreat (תּפֶלֶט) me,” and this teaches us that he [Jacob] instituted the evening prayer. [Scripture] did not write וּתּפֶלֶט, [the usual expression for prayer], to teach that the earth sprang toward him [i.e. the mountain moved toward him], as is explained in the chapter entitled גִּיד הַנָּשָׁה (Chullin 91b).

because the sun had set Heb. כָּל בֵּט (Scripture) should have written [in reverse order]:“And the sun set (וּבֵט) and he stayed there overnight.” [The expression כָּל בֵּט implies that the sun set suddenly for him, not at its usual time, so that he would have to stay there overnight. [From Gen. Rabbah 68:10, Chullin 91b]

Genesis 28:20-21

(וְ) וַיַּזְכָּר נַעֲקָב דֵּרֵךְ לֵאמְרוּ אָמְרִי הַלָּהֶם צְמֶרִי בּוֹדֶךְ הָאָשֶׁר
אֲנָכִי חוֹלֶה נִחְתָּל לְחָשׁ לְאַלֹנִי בֹּדֶךְ לָלֹשׁ
(כִּי) יִשְׁבֶּתָּ בְּשָׁלוֹם אֲלֵךְ בָּאָבִי הַלָּהֶם לְאַלֹנִי:

Genesis 28:20-21

20. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and garment to put on,
21. So that I come back to my father’s house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God;
And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. 

[G-d] showed him in a prophetic dream that everything that happens on Earth is carried out by angels, and it is all divinely decreed upon them from above, because G-d’s angels when sent to walk the earth, won’t carry out any mission, big or small without returning to the Master of the earth and reporting ‘we have walked the earth and it is peaceful, or it is full of bloodshed’, and He commands them to return to earth and do his bidding.

And He showed him, that He is standing over this ladder, promising a big promise that Jacob will not be handled by angels, but he will be the portion of G-d, and g-d will be with him constantly, As he says in the following passage. This is a greater level than the other Righteous people, of whom it is said, ‘And He shall command his angels to protect you in all your ways.’

And the great R. Eliezer (in the Pirkei d’R.Eliezer) likened this to the Covenant with Abraham, because he showed him four empires, their rise and fall, and that’s why it says ‘angels of powers’ as is written in the book of Daniel (10;13) ‘The minister of the empire of Greece, etc.’ (trans. Sareet Jacob)
Genesis 28:15
15. And, behold, I am with you, and will keep you in all places where you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you, until I have done that about which I have spoken to you.

Deuteronomy 32:9
9. For the Lord’s portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.

Midrash Tanchuma: Vayetze-Chapter 2
"And angels were ascending and descending"- R. Shmuel b. Nahman said, “these are the ministers of the [non-Jewish] nations of the world. R. Shmuek b. Nahman said, “this teaches us that G-d showed Jacob the minister of Babylon rising 70 rungs and then descending, and the minister of Media [rising] 52, and [the minister] of Greece [rising] 100 and descending, and [the minister] of Edom rising, and he didn’t know how much. Then Jacob was afraid and said, ‘maybe this one doesn’t fall?’ G-d said to him, ‘Do not fear my servant Jacob and do not tremble Israel (Jeremiah 30)’ Even if you see him rise
as if to my height I will bring him down, as it says (Ovadiah 1) ‘If you rise up like the eagle, or place your nest among the stars from there I will bring you down, says G-d.’ R. Berechia said in the name of Halbo and r. Shimon b. Yusina, This teaches that G-d showed Jacob the minister of Babylon rising and falling, and the minister of Media rising and falling. G-d said to Jacob, “why are you not going up?” and Jacob was afraid and said, ‘Maybe I will rise and fall like the others?’ G-d said ‘If you ascend, you will never descend.’ He didn’t believe Him, and he didn’t ascend…G-d said, ‘If you had ascended and believed in me, you would never have fallen. Because you didn’t believe in me, your descendants will be ruled by each of these four empires… Jacob said, ‘could it be eradicate them.’ (trans. Sareet Jacob)

Likutei Moharan 1:52
R. Hanina ben Hahinai says, “One who is awake at night, one who walks alone on the path, and one who empties his heart wastefully, behold he is liable for his soul. (Mishna Avot, 3).
Because there are heretics who believe that the world necessarily exists a priori. And according to their evil, confused idea they believe that they have proofs and signs of this, G-d forbid, from the patterns of the world. But truly, they are all hot air, because in truth the world and its contents are a possibility of existence. Because only God’s existence is necessary, and the existence of all the worlds and all that they contain, is optional. Because He, may He be blessed, created them all from nothing, and it was within his power, capacity and ability to create or not create them. Therefore, certainly the whole world is a possibility of existence. (trans. Sareet Jacob)

Genesis 29:1:

Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east.

Sforno Genesis 29:1
And Jacob lifted up his legs – When a person travels toward a place of his own volition, it shows on him, and he carries his own legs. But when he travels away from a place with nowhere to rest his feet, it shows on him, because his feet carry him, as where it is written, “Her legs lead her…” (trans. Sareet Jacob)

*Sources not included on this source sheet:*
Sefer Beit Ya’akov on the Torah Genesis, Vayeitze,15

Unless otherwise noted, all English Translations are from Judaica Press, available online at www.chabad.org