

פרשת

ויצא

*Parashat Vayetze*

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*Bereshit / Genesis 28:10-32:2, Hosea 12:12-14:10  
Matthew 3:13-4:11*

## **Communicating with God**

In this week's Torah portion we read about Jacob's Ladder which provides us with an illustration of the connection between heaven and earth when the Patriarch Jacob dreams during his fleeing from his brother Esau. The significance of the dream has been debated over the centuries, but most interpretations agree that it identified Jacob with the obligations and inheritance of the people whom God has chosen and is drawing to Himself. Rashi opens saying the angels descended to go with Jacob out of the Promised Land.

### ***Rashi on Bereshit / Genesis 28:12 Part 1***

עלים וירדים *ASCENDING AND DESCENDING* —  
*It states first ascending and afterwards descending!  
Those angels who accompanied him in the land of Is-  
rael were not permitted to leave the Land: they ascend-  
ed to Heaven and angels which were to minister out-  
side the Land descended to accompany him (Genesis  
Rabbah 68:12).*

Studying the Tanach and the Apostolic Writings coupled with the Rabbinic literature, there may be something more to the dream than

meets the eye. In the rabbinic literature, the Midrashic approach to Jacob's dream (see *Midrash Rabbah on Bereshit / Genesis 68:12-14*) seems to be a hyperbole of the revelation of God at the Mountain of Sinai. The word סֹלֶמַת, ladder, is equated with סִינַי, Mount Sinai (see *Ibn Ezra on Bereshit / Genesis 28:12 Part 1*). The connection is made by the numerical value of the letters in both words are the same (130, *Daat Zkenim on Bereshit / Genesis 28:12 Part 1*) the rabbis say provides us with a future expectation of the people of Israel standing at the mountain of Sinai with Moshe to receive the Torah. The parallel is in Moshe and Aaron acting as God's messengers on earth, whereas the angels of God ascending and descending (analogous to Moshe and Aaron ascending and descending Sinai) are also God's messengers on earth. Other Midrashic descriptions are of the angels Jacob saw as being inquisitive of Jacob to get a close up look at him saying that Jacob's likeness was engraved upon God's throne. Ibn Ezra goes on to say in his commentary on *Bereshit / Genesis 28:12 Part 2* saying, "*And Rabbi Shlomo HaSefardi said that 'ladder' hints at the highest soul and 'G-d's angels' hints at wise thoughts.*" In addition to this, Ibn Ezra also states in Part 3, "*Rabbi Joshua said that the reason for the ladder is that his (Jacob's) prayer rose on it and his salvation from the heavens came down on it...*" He is basically saying that prayer goes up to heaven by way of the ladder, and salvation comes down by way of the ladder. It is interesting how this ladder represents all of these things, Sinai, the giving of the Torah, prayer ascending the salvation of God descending from the heavens. Ibn Ezra says (Part 4) "*the ladder here is a metaphor, for nothing is concealed from God. Worldly things hang onto the heavens as though there is a ladder between them, upon which the angels go up to report on things after they have been walking along the earth. Likewise, it is written that other angels descend to fulfill G-d's tasks, like a king with his servants.*" Based upon the rabbinic literature, the ladder symbolized the messengers of God, of the angels seeking to see Jacob whose image was engraved into God's throne, his prayers ascended and the salvation of God descended upon Jacob by way of the ladder, and how all things are revealed from God (i.e. nothing is concealed from God), and how the angels descend to fulfill God's tasks and then ascend to report to the Lord what is happening. If we couple this to Yeshua's words in

John chapter 1 (1:51) in the application to himself as being that ladder, and to Jacob fleeing from Esau we find the context of the son of man having no place to lay his head just as Jacob when he was fleeing his brother and having to sleep with a rock as his pillow and in the Messiah all of these things being true. The rabbinic literature provides a rich contextual background on the messianic identity of the Son of Man being connected to Jacob's ladder.

***Bereshit / Genesis 28:10-11***

*28:10 Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. 28:11 He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. 28:12 He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 28:13 And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, 'I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. 28:14 'Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 28:15 'Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.' 28:16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. 28:17 He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' 28:18 So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. 28:19 He called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz. 28:20 Then*

*Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, 28:21 and I return to my father's house in safety, then the Lord will be my God. 28:22 'This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.' 29:1 Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the sons of the east. (NASB)*

י וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שָׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חֲרָנָה: יא וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם וַיֵּלֶן שָׁם כִּי-בָא הַשָּׁמַשׁ וַיִּקַּח מֵאבְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם וַיִּשֶׂם מְרָאֲ-  
וַשְׁתִּיּוֹ וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּמָּקוֹם הַהוּא: יב וַיַּחְלֵם וְהִנֵּה סֹלֶם מַצֵּב  
אַרְצָה וְרֹאשׁוֹ מֵגִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְהִנֵּה מְלֹאכֵי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים  
וַיִּרְדִּים בּוֹ: יג וְהִנֵּה יְהוָה נֹצֵב עָלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֶיךָ וְאֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שֹׁכֵב  
עָלֶיהָ לֵךְ אֶתְנַנֶּה וְלִזְרְעֶךָ: יד וְהָיָה זֶרְעֶךָ כְּעֶפֶר הָאָרֶץ  
וּפְרֻצֹת יָמָה וְקִדְמָה וְצַפְנָה וְנִגְבָּה וְנִבְרַכְוּ בָּךְ כָּל-מְשֻׁפָּחַת  
הָאֲדָמָה וּבְזֶרְעֶךָ: טו וְהִנֵּה אָנֹכִי עֹמֵד וְשִׁמְרֹתֶיךָ בְּכֹל  
אֲשֶׁר-תֵּלֵךְ וְהִשְׁבַּתֶּיךָ אֶל-הָאֲדָמָה הַזֹּאת כִּי לֹא אֶעֱזֹבְךָ עַד  
אֲשֶׁר אִם-עָשִׂיתִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר-דִּבַּרְתִּי לָךְ: טז וַיִּיקֶן יַעֲקֹב  
מִשְׁנָתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אָכֵן יֵשׁ יְהוָה בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאָנֹכִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי:  
יז וַיִּירָא וַיֹּאמֶר מֵה-נִזְרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה אֵין זֶה כִּי אִם-בֵּית  
אֱלֹהִים וְזֶה שְׁעַר הַשָּׁמַיִם: יח וַיִּשְׁכֶם יַעֲקֹב בַּבֶּקֶר וַיִּקַּח  
אֶת-הָאֶבֶן אֲשֶׁר-שָׂם מְרֹאֲשֹׁתָיו וַיִּשֶׂם אֹתָהּ מַצְבֵּה וַיִּצַק  
שָׁמֶן עַל-רֹאשָׁהּ: יט וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-שֵׁם-הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא בֵּית-  
אֵל וְאוּלָם לִוְז שֵׁם-הָעִיר לְרֹאשְׁנָה: כ וַיִּדַּר יַעֲקֹב נָדָר  
לֵאמֹר אִם-יְהִיָּה אֱלֹהִים עֹמְדֵי וְשִׁמְרֵנִי בַדֶּרֶךְ הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר  
אָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ וְנָתַן-לִי לֶחֶם לֶאֱכֹל וּבְגָד לְלַבֵּשׁ: כא וְשִׁבַּתִּי  
בְּשָׁלוֹם אֶל-בֵּית אָבִי וְהָיָה יְהוָה לִי לְאֱלֹהִים: כב וְהָאֶבֶן  
הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר-שָׂמְתִי מַצְבֵּה יְהִיָּה בֵּית אֱלֹהִים וְכָל אֲשֶׁר תִּתֶּן-  
לִי עֲשׂוֹר אֶעֱשֶׂרְנוּ לָךְ:

In addition to how the rabbis interpret these Scriptures, we read the

following:

***Daat Zkenim on Genesis 28:12 Part 2***

*והנה סולם מוצב ארצה, “and (in his dream) he saw a ladder planted on the earth;” at the burning bush, where Moses had his first communication from G–d, the fire from that bush rose to the heart of the heavens. At that time Moses was told specifically that the Israelites, Yaakov’s descendants shall worship G–d there.*

Daat Zkenim states that the ladder had moved in time and space to the burning bush for Moshe to communicate with God for the first time, the fire from the bush ascended to heaven on the ladder. The ladder provides a means for direct communication with heaven. In the application of the ladder to the Messiah, this could be a reference to the Messianic expectation that culminates in the deliverance of Israel (God’s people) being set free from slavery and sin. Jacob’s dream has been interpreted as symbolizing one being sent of God, whose image is engraved into the throne of God, prayers ascending the ladder and salvation descending, and all things being revealed from God, nothing is hidden. The description goes a long way to reveal how Yeshua was using Jacob’s ladder analogy in reference to himself as the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Messiah in *John 1:32-51*. The basic idea here is that the coming of the Messiah was fully imaged in the ancient Jewish texts and that Yeshua’s core teachings were part and parcel with Jewish beliefs at that time. (*Both Yeshua and Paul did not invent something new.*)

***John 1:32-51***

*1:32 John testified saying, ‘I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 1:33 ‘I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ 1:34 ‘I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.’ 1:35 Again the next day*

*John was standing with two of his disciples, 1:36 and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God!' 1:37 The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 1:38 And Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, 'What do you seek?' They said to Him, 'Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?' 1:39 He said to them, 'Come, and you will see.' So they came and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. 1:40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 1:41 He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which translated means Christ). 1:42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter). 1:43 The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, 'Follow Me.' 1:44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. 1:45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' 1:46 Nathanael said to him, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' 1:47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!' 1:48 Nathanael said to Him, 'How do You know me?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.' 1:49 Nathanael answered Him, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.' 1:50 Jesus answered and said to him, 'Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.' 1:51 And He said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descend-*



*ing on the Son of Man.’ (NASB)*

The use of Jacob’s ladder analogy from Parashat Vayetze is Yeshua’s way of referring to a prophetic revelation of who he is and of what He had come to do. (see *Or HaChaim on Genesis 28:12 Part 1*) This is how the Hebrew Text is interpreted "וַיִּחְלֶם וְהִנֵּה סֻלָּם, *And he dreamed that there was a ladder, etc. Inasmuch as many dreams contain matter without significance, the Torah added the word וְהִנֵּה to indicate that in this dream every detail appeared to Jacob as especially vivid and significant. He had total recall of everything he dreamed and referred to each detail later on. This is why the word וְהִנֵּה is repeated before every segment of the dream. The Torah thereby characterizes the dream as a prophetic revelation.*" Here in John chapter 1, John testifies of the Word of God descending and dwelling in a human body. The opening sections of John chapter 1 go to lengths to establish the divine origin of the Word of God and then leads on to the expectation of the Messiah. We are told of the disciples telling their brothers what they heard and Yeshua speaks to Nathanael about seeing him under the fig tree (*John 1:48*) and Nathanael responds saying “*Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.*” Yeshua responds with a seemingly strange response, *1:51 And He said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’ (NASB)* The Jerusalem Targum understands the function of these angels as having been assigned to accompany Yaakov from here on to wherever he went. The rabbinic reason that they ascended was to relay their messages to other angels in the celestial spheres that they had been assigned to descend to earth. They were to show them that there was a human being of the stature of Yaakov on earth. They would recognise him at once as a likeness of his features had long been engraved at the base of God’s throne. (*Chizkuni, Genesis 28:12 Part 1 speaks of Jacob in this way.*) In Yeshua’s statement using Jacob’s ladder from Parashat Vayetze, he was emphasizing the idea that Nathanael will see greater things than what he had just heard, the Lord knowing him before he had met him. The power of God will be shown forth where the Messiah (the ladder) comes as the messenger of God, to bear witness as the example to live by whose image had long been engraved into God’s throne, through whom in

His Name our prayers ascend and the salvation of God descends by way of God's Messiah (i.e. the ladder). There are significant parallels here in the NT descriptions of the Messiah as compared to the rabbinic literature. What we find here are the rabbis establishing the meaning of the ladder in Jacob's dream and then Yeshua using these similitudes as referring to himself as the Messiah of God.

Taking all of these things into consideration, some Jewish commentators argue that Christianity appropriated the Hebrew bible and turned it to its own non-Jewish purposes and thus distorting its meanings. Other Jewish commentaries as we are seeing here in this week's study tend to uphold and not destroy the narratives found in the Apostolic Writings providing us with a sort of background for why Yeshua used this ladder to describe himself. Based upon what we have read thus far, the rabbinic literature actually provides some excellent background information in the interpretations of the rabbis for the literary and hermeneutical context of Yeshua's seemingly out of place statement. What Yeshua was doing was employing a deeply rabbinic teaching technique. Taking all of these things into context, we can see how the New Testament is deeply embedded within Second Temple Jewish life and thought.

It is at this point we discover the major distinction between Yeshua and the Apostle Paul. Yeshua spoke to his people who were living in the land of Israel teaching them primarily in Hebrew in a form that was identical to the rabbis (rabbinic method). Yeshua was provincial. Paul on the other hand was international, he worked outside of the Land of Israel, teaching and preaching in Greek. Yeshua spoke to the Jewish people and Paul spoke to the pagan gentiles. Both Yeshua and Paul held a high view of God's Torah. Based upon what we read about Yeshua, he had a thorough understanding of the Torah and the rabbis (oral tradition, Mishnah) and he taught from this point of view. Paul on the other hand took an approach to the Torah that had a new Messianic component. The messianic idea that Paul took hold of was that the Messiah had come and so the Messiah and the Torah both occupied a position of centrality for the theology of the Apostle Paul. Paul was fulfilling the prophesy of Isaiah in the sense of taking the Word of God and His Messiah Yeshua to the nations.



***Isaiah 2:1-5***

*2:1 The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2:2 Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the Lord Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 2:3 And many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths.' For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 2:4 And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war. 2:5 Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the Lord. (NASB)*

Here Isaiah speaks of a future expectation of the Lord God Almighty putting into the hearts of many peoples to go to Jerusalem and worship the Lord, bringing peace to the hearts of men indicated by the beating of the swords and spears into gardening tools never to make wars again. Paul was called to teach the gospel message (the Messiah and the Torah) to a lost gentile world. In light of these things, we can understand how Paul was bringing together both Jews and non-Jews together to form an early community of believers through a meaningful relationship with one another based upon their common faith in God, in His Messiah Yeshua, and in the teachings contained within the Hebrew bible.

In light of this week's Torah portion, the interpretations of the rabbis on Jacob's ladder that are coupled with Yeshua's use of the ladder as referring to himself (*John 1:51*), the conceptual value is of the Lord God Almighty opening the individual to experience God in the dynamics of every day life. "*For in him we live, and move, and have our being...*" (*Acts 17:28*). The Messiah comes to lead the way as the messenger of God as the example to live by whose image was

engraved into God's throne, through whom in His Name our prayers ascend and the salvation of God descends. We have a direct communication line to our Father in heaven (like a ladder between heaven and earth. In the Messiah, we are *"set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 6:22-23) The significance of Yeshua's statement to Nathanael was in the consequences of Yeshua being the communication path to heaven (that ladder) that facilitates a relationship with God through faith. Faith in God's Messiah causes God's Spirit to dwell within us and to empower our lives for righteousness a by product of the salvation that God has given. This is the liberation of the flesh into the life of the Spirit, that holy life being characterized by joining with God according to the Torah in His redemptive outreach to a hurting world. This is the description Yeshua was giving, that mightier things than these will Nathanael will see according to *John 1:51* making reference to the transformation of lives for the glory of God!