

THOUGHT OF NACHMANIDES: VAYEITZEI: LOCATION OF JACOB'S LADDER Gavriel Z. Bellino – November 18, 2015

Nachmanides on Genesis 28:17

17. THIS IS NONE OTHER THAN THE HOUSE OF G-D, AND THIS IS THE GATE OF HEAVEN. This refers to the Sanctuary which is the gate through which the prayers and sacrifices ascend to heaven. Rashi comments, Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Jose the son of Zimra said, "This ladder stood in Beer-Sheba and its slope reached unto the Sanctuary in Jerusalem. Beer-Sheba is situated in the southern part of Judah, and Jerusalem is to its north on the boundary between Judah and Benjamin, and Beth-El was in the northern portion of Benjamin's territory, on the boundary between Benjamin's territory and that of the children of Joseph. It follows, therefore, that a ladder whose base is in Beer-Sheba and whose top is in Beth-el has its slope reaching opposite Jerusalem.

Now regarding the statement of our Rabbis: "This righteous man has come to the place where I dwell, (Chullin 91b)" and they also said, "Jacob gave the name Bethel to Jerusalem," (Pesachim 88b) this place which he called Bethel was Luz and not Jerusalem! And from where did they learn to say so, [implying that Luz is identical with Jerusalem]? I therefore say that Mount Moriah [the Temple site in Jerusalem] was removed from its place and came here to Luz, and this is "the springing of the earth" which is mentioned in Shechitat Chullin, that the site on which the Sanctuary was later to stand came towards him to Bethel. And this too is what is meant by *vayiphga bamakom* (and he met the place).

פרוש הרמב"ן על ספר בראשית כח:יז

(יז) כִּי אִם בֵּית אֱלֹהִים זֶה שְׁעַר הַשָּׁמַיִם. הוּא בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ שֶׁהוּא שְׁעַר לַעֲלֹת מַשָּׁם הַתְּפִלוֹת וְהַקְרְבָּנוֹת לַשָּׁמַיִם. וְכָתַב רַשִׁי אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּשֶׁם ר' יוֹסִי בֶן זִמְרָא (ב"ר ס"ט ה'), הַסֵּלֶם הַזֶּה עוֹמֵד בְּבֵאֵר שֶׁבַע, וְשְׁפוּעוֹ מֵגִיעַ עַד בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, שֶׁבַע שְׁבַע עוֹמֵד בְּדְרוֹמוֹ שֶׁל יְהוּדָה, וִירוּשָׁלַם בְּצִפּוֹנוֹ בְּגָבֹול שְׁבִין יְהוּדָה וּבְנִימִין, וּבֵית אֵל הִיא בְּצִפּוֹן שֶׁל נְחֹלֶת בְּנִימִין, בְּגָבֹול שְׁבִין בְּנִימִין וּבִין בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף, נִמְצָא סֵלֶם רִגְלֵיו בְּבֵאֵר שֶׁבַע וְרֹאשׁוֹ בְּבֵית אֵל מֵגִיעַ שְׁפוּעוֹ כְּנֶגֶד יְרוּשָׁלַם.

וְשֶׁאָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ (חֲלִין צ"א:) צָדִיק זֶה בָּא לְבֵית מְלוֹנִי, וְעוֹד אָמְרוּ (פֶּסַחִים פ"ח.) יַעֲקֹב קָרָא בֵּית אֵל, וְזוֹ לֹוּ הִיא וְלֹא יְרוּשָׁלַם, וּמֵהִיכָן לְמָדוּ לוֹמַר כֵּן, אֲנִי אוֹמֵר שֶׁנֶּעֱקַר הַר הַמֹּרִיָּה וּבָא לְכָאן וְזוֹ הִיא קְפִיצַת הָאָרֶץ הָאֲמֹרָה בְּשַׁחֲטַת חֲלִין (חֲלִין צ"א:) שֶׁבַע בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ לְקִרְאָתוֹ עַד בֵּית אֵל, וְזֶהוּ וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם:

If you should ask, when our father Jacob passed the site of the Sanctuary [on his way from Beersheba to Haran] why did He not detain him there?' The answer is: If it never entered his mind to pray at the place where his fathers had prayed, should Heaven make him stop there? He had journeyed as far as Haran, as we say in the chapter of Gid Hanasheh, and Scripture itself helps us clarify this point by saying, "And he went to Haran." When he arrived at Haran he said, "Is it possible that I have passed the place where my fathers prayed without praying there myself?" He decided to return and had returned as far as Bethel, whereupon the ground of the Temple site sprang for him until Bethel. All these are the words of the Rabbi. (Rashi)

But I do not agree with this at all for "the springing of the earth," which the Rabbis mention in connection with Jacob, is like that which they have said happened to Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, namely, that he reached Haran in one day. As they have said in Tractate Sanhedrin 95b, "The earth sprang for three persons: Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, our father Jacob, and Abishai the son of Zeruiah.,, (II Samuel 21:17)." And the Rabbis explained: "Eliezer, the servant of Abraham - for it is written, And I came this day to the fountain, (Genesis 24:42) which teaches that on that very day he embarked on his journey. Jacob - for it is written, And he met the place. When he arrived at Haran he said, 'Is it possible that I have passed the place where my fathers prayed without praying there myself?' As soon as the thought of returning occurred to him, the earth sprang for him, and immediately he met the place."

וְאִם תֹּאמַר, כְּשֶׁעָבַר יַעֲקֹב אֲבִינוּ עַל
בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ מִדּוּעַ לֹא עָכְבוּהוּ
שָׁם, אִיהוּ לֹא יָהֵב דַּעְתִּיהָ לְהִתְפַּלֵּל
בְּמָקוֹם שֶׁהִתְפַּלְלוּ אֲבוֹתָיו, וּמִן הַשָּׁמַיִם
יַעֲכֹבוּהוּ. אִיהוּ עַד חֶרֶן אֲזַל, כְּדֹאמְרֵינוּ
בְּפֶרֶק גִּיד הַנָּשָׂה (שם), וְקָרָא מְסִיעֵ לָן
וַיֵּלֶךְ חֲרָנָה, כִּי מָטָא לְחֶרֶן אָמַר אֶפְשָׁר
עָבַרְתִּי עַל מָקוֹם שֶׁהִתְפַּלְלוּ בּוֹ אֲבוֹתַי וְלֹא
הִתְפַּלַּלְתִּי בּוֹ, יָהֵב דַּעְתִּיהָ לְמַהֲדֹר, וְחֹזֵר
עַד בֵּית אֵל, קִפְצָה לִּיה אֶרְעָא עַד בֵּית
אֵל. כָּל אֱלוֹ דְּבָרֵי הָרֹב:

וְלֹא נִרְאָה לִי כָלֵל, שְׂאִין קִפִּיצַת הָאָרֶץ
שֶׁהִזְכִּירוּ בְּיַעֲקֹב אֶלָּא כְּאוֹתָהּ
שֶׁאָמְרוּ בְּאַלְיַעֲזָר עֶבֶד אֲבִרָהָם שֶׁבָּא בְּיוֹם
אֶחָד לְחֶרֶן, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ בְּסִנְהֶדְרִין (צ"ה:)
שְׁלֹשָׁה קִפְצָה לָהֶם הָאָרֶץ, אֶלְיַעֲזָר עֶבֶד
אֲבִרָהָם, וַיַּעֲקֹב אֲבִינוּ, וְאַבְיִשַׁי בֶּן צְרוּיָה.
וּפִרְשׁוּ אֶלְיַעֲזָר עֶבֶד אֲבִרָהָם, דְּכָתִיב (לְעִיל
כ"ד מ"ב) וְאַבָּא הַיּוֹם אֶל הָעֵין, לְמַמְרָא
דִּיהוּא יוֹמָא נִפְקַ יַעֲקֹב, דְּכָתִיב וַיִּפְגַּע
בְּמָקוֹם. כִּי מָטָא לְחֶרֶן אָמַר, אֶפְשָׁר
שֶׁעָבַרְתִּי עַל מָקוֹם שֶׁהִתְפַּלְלוּ אֲבוֹתַי וְלֹא
הִתְפַּלַּלְתִּי בּוֹ, כִּיִּין דִּיהֲרֹהַר בְּדַעְתִּיהָ
לְמַהֲדֹר קִפְצָה לִּיה אֶרְעָא, מִיָּד וַיִּפְגַּע
בְּמָקוֹם:

Thus the Rabbis explicitly say that as soon as the thought to return occurred to him in Haran, the earth sprang for him and he met the place where his fathers prayed, but not that he returned to Bethel, nor that Mount Moriah sprang and came there to Bethel. In Bereshit Rabbah the Rabbis further equated them both [Eliezer and Jacob] with respect to "the springing of the earth." Thus they said: "And he arose., and went to Aram-Naharaim - on the very same day. And I came this day to the fountain - this day I embarked on the journey, and this day I arrived." With respect to Jacob the Rabbis interpreted in a similar vein: "And he went to Haran ; the Rabbis say on the very same day." And furthermore, what reason is there for Mount Moriah to "spring" and come to Bethel, as Rashi claims, after Jacob had troubled himself to return from Haran to Bethel, a journey of many days? Moreover, Bethel does not lie on the border of the Land of Israel which faces towards Haran for Haran is a land which lies to the east [of the Land of Israel while Bethel lies in its western part]. Additionally, the middle part of a ladder is not referred to as its "Slope." And, finally, what reason is there for the middle of the ladder to be opposite Bethel, [where, according to Rashi, the side of the Sanctuary had been transported], when the middle part of an object does not possess significance beyond that of its whole?

There is, however, another intent to these Midrashim. The Rabbis have said in Genesis Rabbah, "Rabbi Hoshayah said, 'It has already been stated, And Jacob hearkened to his father and his mother, and was gone to Paddan-Aram.' What then does Scripture teach by repeating, And Jacob went out from Beer-Sheba? Rather, the redundancy teaches us that Jacob said, "My father desired to leave the Land of Israel, at what location did he seek permission for it? Was it not in Beer-Sheba? I too, shall go to Beer-Sheba to seek this permission. If He grants me permission, I shall leave, and if not, I shall not go." Therefore Scripture found it necessary to state, "And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba."

הנה בפרוש אומרים שכינן שעלה בלבו
בחרן לחזור קפצה לו הארץ ופגע
במקום שהתפללו בו אבותיו, לא שחזר
לבית אל ולא שקפץ הר המוריה ובא
לשם. ובבראשית רבה (נ"ט י"א) עוד עשו
שניהם שוים בקפיצה, אמרו ויקם וילך
אל ארם נהרים (לעיל כ"ד י'), בר יומו,
ואבא היום אל העין, היום יצאתי והיום
באתי. וביעקב דרשו (ב"ר ס"ח ח') כן, וילך
חרנה, רבנין אמרין בר יומו. ומה טעם
שיקפץ הר המוריה ויבא עד בית אל אחר
שטרח יעקב לחזור מחרן ועד בית אל
מהלך כמה ימים. ועוד, כי בית אל איננו
סוף גבול ארץ ישראל מפאת חרן, כי חרן
ארץ קדם הוא. ועוד, שאין האמצעות
נקרא שפוע הסלם. ועוד, מה טעם להיותו
כנגד בית אל, והאמצע אינו מורה על
דבר יותר מכלו:

אבל מדרשים הללו ענין אחר להם.
אמרו שם בבראשית רבה (ס"ח ה')
אמר רבי הושעיה, כבר כתיב (לעיל כ"ח ז')
וישמע יעקב אל אביו ואל אמו וילך
פדנה ארם, ומה תלמוד לומר ויצא יעקב
מבאר שבע, אלא אמר, אבא בשעה
שבקש לצאת לחוצה לארץ מהיכן הרשה
לו, לא מבאר שבע, אף אני הריני הולך
לבאר שבע, אם נותן לי רשות הריני יוצא
ואם לאו איני יוצא, לפיכך הוצרך הכתוב
לומר ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע:

The intent of this Midrash is that the Rabbis were of the opinion that Jacob was blessed by his father in Hebron, the land of his father's sojournings, and it was to Hebron that he came when he returned to his father from Paddan-Aram, as it is said, "And Jacob came unto Isaac his father to Mamre, to Kiriath-Arba the same is Hebron" - where Abraham and Isaac sojourned. Now if so, the verse stating, "And Jacob went out from Beer-Sheba" teaches that when his father commanded him to go to Laban he went to Beer-Sheba to receive Divine permission, and that is the place wherein he spent the night and saw visions of God, and it was there that He gave him permission to exit from the Land of Israel even as He said, "And I will keep thee wherever thou goest and bring thee back unto this land."

And the ladder which he saw, in the opinion of Rabbi Jose the son of Zimra, he saw with its feet in Beer-Sheba, in the very place where he lay, and with the end of its slope which is the top of the ladder reaching to a point opposite the Sanctuary. It was supported by heaven at the gate through which the angels enter and exit. The revered God stood over him, and therefore he knew that Beer-Sheba was the gate of heaven, suitable for prayer, and the Sanctuary was the house of G-d. And in the morning Jacob continued his journey from Beer-Sheba and arrived at Haran on the same day, and this was "the springing of the earth" mentioned with respect to Jacob. This is the opinion of Rabbi Jose the son of Zimra who said in Genesis Rabbah, "This ladder stood in Beer-Sheba and its slope reached to the Sanctuary, as it is said, "And Jacob went out from Beer-Sheba; And he was afraid and said, How fearful is this place."

וְכִנְיָת הַמִּדְרָשׁ הַזֶּה כִּי הֵם סְבוּרִים
שֶׁיַּעֲקֹב בְּחֶבְרוֹן נִתְבָּרַךְ שֶׁהוּא
אֶרֶץ מְגוּרֵי אָבִיו, וְלִשְׁם חֲזֹר אֵלָיו, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר
(לְהֵלֵךְ לִ"ה כ"ז) וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב אֶל יִצְחָק אָבִיו
מִמְּרָא קְרִית הָאֲרָבֶעַ הִיא חֶבְרוֹן אֲשֶׁר גֵּר
שָׁם אֲבֹרָהֶם וַיִּצְחָק. וְאִם כֵּן הִפְתִּיב שֶׁאֵמַר
וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שֶׁבַע, כִּי כֹאֲשֶׁר צִוְּהוּ
אָבִיו לָלֶכֶת אֶל לָבָן הֲלֹף שָׁם לִטֹּל רְשׁוּת,
וְהוּא הַמָּקוֹם שֶׁלֵּן בּוֹ וְרָאָה מִרְאֹת אֱלֹהִים
וְנָתַן לוֹ הָרְשׁוּת לְצֵאתָ, כִּמּוֹ שֶׁאֵמַר
וַשְׁמִרְתִּיךָ בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ וְהַשִּׁיבוֹתִיךָ אֶל
הָאֲדָמָה הַזֹּאת:

וְהַסֵּלָם שָׂרָאָה, לְדַעַת רַבִּי יוֹסִי בֶּן זִמְרָא
רָאָה שְׂרֹגְלֵיו בְּבֵאֵר שֶׁבַע
בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הוּא שׁוֹכֵב שָׁם, וְסוּף שְׁפּוּעוֹ
שֶׁהוּא רֹאשׁ הַסֵּלָם מִגִּיעַ עַד כְּנֶגֶד בֵּית
הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, נִסְמָךְ בְּשָׁמַיִם בִּפְתַּח שְׁהַמְלָאָכִים
נִכְנָסִים וְיוֹצְאִים בּוֹ, וְהִשָּׁם הַנִּכְבָּד נֶצֶב
עָלָיו, וְלָכֵן יָדַע שֶׁבֵּאֵר שֶׁבַע הוּא שְׁעַר
הַשָּׁמַיִם טוֹב לְתַפְלָה, וּבֵית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ בֵּית
אֱלֹהִים. וּבִבְקָר נָשָׂא יַעֲקֹב רִגְלָיו מִבְּאֵר
שֶׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חֲרָנָה בֶּן יוֹמוֹ, וְהִיא קְפִיצַת
הַדֶּרֶךְ שָׁלוֹ. זֶה דַּעַת רַבִּי יוֹסִי בֶּן זִמְרָא
שֶׁאֵמַר בְּבֵרָאשִׁית רַבָּה (ס"ט ז') הַסֵּלָם הַזֶּה
עוֹמֵד בְּבֵאֵר שֶׁבַע וְשְׁפּוּעוֹ מִגִּיעַ עַד בֵּית
הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שֶׁבַע,
וַיֵּירָא וַיֹּאמֶר מַה נּוֹרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה:

And the stone which he erected as a pillar he did not erect in the place where he slept, for Beer-Sheba is not Beth-el and it was in Beth-el that he erected it, and there he went upon his return from Paddan-Aram, as it is said, "Arise, go up to Beth-el ... and make there an altar unto G-d who appeared unto thee, etc." But he erected it [after carrying the stone from Beth-el to Jerusalem] opposite the slope, at the place where the head of the ladder stood, which he had called the house of G-d, and this is the city which had previously been called Luz. Thus in the opinion of Rabbi Jose the son of Zimra, Luz was Jerusalem which Jacob called Beth-el. Possibly this may be so, according to the verses in the book of Joshua. It is certainly true that it is not the Beth-el near Ai for that Beth-el was originally so named in the days of Abraham and prior to that.

וְהָאֵבֶן אֲשֶׁר שָׂם מִצְבֵּה לֹא בַּמָּקוֹם שֶׁכִּיבְתוֹ הָקִים אוֹתָם, שֶׁהָרִי בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע אֵינָנוּ בֵּית אֵל, וְהוּא בְּבֵית אֵל הָעֶמִיד אוֹתָהּ וּלְשֵׁם חֲזָר בְּשׁוּבוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (לְהֵלֵךְ לַיהוָה) קוֹם עֲלֵה בֵּית אֵל וַעֲשֵׂה שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לְאֵל הַנִּרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ וְגו', אֲבָל הָקִים אוֹתָהּ כְּגִגֵּד הַשְּׁפוּעַ בַּמָּקוֹם שֶׁרֹאשׁ הַסֵּלַם עוֹמֵד שֶׁקָּרָא אוֹתוֹ בֵּית אֱלֹהִים, וְהִיא עִיר לֹז. וְלִדְעוֹתוֹ שֶׁל רַבִּי יוֹסִי בֶּן זִמְרָא לֹז הִיא יְרוּשָׁלַיִם שֶׁקָּרָאוּ בֵּית אֵל. וְאֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיְהִיָּה בֶּן לָפִי הַמְקַרְאוֹת שֶׁבֶסֶפֶר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ. וּבְאֻמַּת שְׁאִינָנוּ בֵּית אֵל הַסְמוּךְ לְעֵי, כִּי בֶן שָׁם הָעִיר הִיא לְרֹאשׁוֹנָה בִּימֵי אַבְרָהָם וְקֹדֶם לָכֵן:

[Skipping – Ramban then compares this position with many other midrashim]

Thus, all Midrashim - despite some minor differences among them - acknowledge that "the springing of the earth" occurred to Jacob through -which he traveled a journey of many days in the twinkling of an eye. It is possible that all Midrashim concede to one another, and that on all these journeys of his - when going from Beer-Sheba to Haran, when he desired to return to Mount Moriah, and when he left there to go to Haran - the earth "sprang" for him. But there is not one of all these Midrashim which says, as Rashi said, [that Mount Moriah was forcibly removed from its location and was transported to meet him in Beth-el].

וְהִנֵּה הַמְדַרְשִׁים כֻּלָּם, אֵף עַל פִּי שִׁישׁ בִּינְיָהֶם חֲלוּף בַּמְקָצָה, אֲבָל כֻּלָּם מוֹדִים שֶׁקְפִיצַת הָאָרֶץ הִיָּתָה לִיעֲקֹב שֶׁהִלָּךְ מִהִלָּךְ כַּמָּה יָמִים כְּהֶרֶף עֵינַי. וְיִתְבָּן שֶׁכֻּלָּם מוֹדִים זֶה לָזֶה וּבְכָל הַלִּיכּוֹתָיו קָפְצָה לוֹ, בְּלִכְתּוֹ מִבְּאֵר שֶׁבַע לְחָרָן, וּבְרִצּוֹתָיו לְשׁוּבָה לְהָר הַמּוֹרִיָּה, וּבְצֵאתוֹ מִשָּׁם לְחָרָן. וְאֵין אֶחָד מִכָּל הַמְדַרְשִׁים שֶׁיֵּאמַר כְּדִבְרֵי רַשִׁ"י:

