

“COUNT THE MIRACLES”

Ramban on Parashat Vayigash

The Sixteenth Street Synagogue – December 30, 2006

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Genesis 46:15

These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, with his daughter Dinah; all his sons and his daughters [numbered] thirty-three.

ספר בראשית מ"ו:ט"ו

אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי לֵאָה אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב בְּפַדְדָן
אָרָם וְאֵת דִּינָה בְּתוֹ כָּל נַפְשׁ בָּנָיו וּבָנוֹתָיו
שְׁלֹשִׁים וְשָׁלֹשׁ:

Ramban on Genesis 46:15

פרוש הרמב"ן על ספר בראשית מ"ו:ט"ו

THIRTY AND THREE. But in the above enumeration you will find only thirty-two. However, the one whose name is omitted is Jochebed who was born as they entered the border city, as it is said, “Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, whom [her mother] bore to Levi in Egypt.” She was born in Egypt, but she was not conceived in Egypt. This is the view of our Rabbis.

(טו) שְׁלֹשִׁים וְשָׁלֹשׁ. וּבְפָרְטָן אֵי אִתָּהּ
מוֹצֵא אֶלָּא שְׁלֹשִׁים
וְשִׁתַּיִם, אֶלָּא זֶה יוֹכְבֵד שֶׁנּוֹלְדָה בְּכַנְיֹסְתָן
לְעִיר, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (בְּמִדְבָר כ"ו נ"ט) אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה
אִתָּהּ לְלוֹי בְּמִצְרַיִם, לִידְתָּהּ בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאִין
הוֹרְתָהּ בְּמִצְרַיִם, זֶה הִיא שֵׁשֶׁת רְבֹוֹתֵינוּ
(סוּטָה י"ב.ב):

But Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra replied, saying that “This is surprising, for if so, why did Scripture not mention the wonder that befell her, for she gave birth to Moses when she was one hundred and thirty years old? And why did it mention the case of Sarah who gave birth when she was ninety years old? This distress was not yet sufficient for us so that the poets came and composed liturgical poems for the day of *Simchath Torah*, wherein they state, ‘Jochebed, my mother, will be comforted after me,’ and thus she was two hundred and fifty years old at the death of Moses! Is the proof of the poets for this longevity of Jochebed because Ahijah the Shilonite lived a life of great duration? If so, this is but an Aggadic tradition or the opinion of a single authority.” These are the words of Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra.

וְרַבִּי אַבְרָהָם הַשֵּׁיב וְאָמַר כִּי זֶה תִּימָה,
אִם בֶּן לָמָּה לֹא הִזְכִּיר הַכְּתוּב
הַפְּלֵא שֶׁנֶּעֱשֶׂה עִמָּה שֶׁהוֹלִידָה מִשָּׁה וְהִיא
בֵּת מֵאָה וְשָׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה, וְלָמָּה הִזְכִּיר דִּבְר
שָׁרָה שֶׁהִיְתָה בֵּת תְּשַׁעִים. וְלֹא דִי לָנוּ זֶה
הַצָּעַר עַד שֶׁעָשׂוּ הַפִּיטְנִים פִּיּוּטִים בְּיוֹם
שִׁמְחַת תּוֹרָה יוֹכְבֵד אִמִּי אַחֲרֵי הַתְּנַחְמִי,
וְהִנֵּה הִיא בֵּת מֵאָתִים וְחֻמָּשִׁים שָׁנָה. וְכִי
אַחֲרָיָה הַשִּׁילֹנִי חָזַק בָּהּ וְכָף שָׁנִים, דִּרְוֹן
הַגְּדָה, אוֹ דְבָרֵי יְחִיד, אֵלּוּ דְבָרָיו:

Now lest he be wise in his own eyes in contradicting the words of our Rabbis, I must answer him and say that in any case, there is in the matter of Jochebed a great wonder of the hidden miracles which constitute the foundation of the Torah. Jochebed was Levi's actual daughter, and not merely his offspring, as it is written, Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, whom [her mother] bore to Levi, and it is furthermore written, "And Amram, took himself Jochebed his father's sister for a wife". Now if we would say that Levi begot Jochebed in his younger years, just as he begot all his sons, this would place her birth soon after his descent into Egypt, and she would have been very old at the time of Moses' birth, at or near the age stated by our Rabbis.

And if we would say that he begot her after he resided in Egypt for many years say, for a period of fifty seven years then Levi would have been one hundred years old at Jochebed's birth, for when he went down to Egypt he was forty-three years of age. In that case, there were two great wonders! [Levi, at the time he begot Jochebed], was as old as Abraham, concerning whom Scripture mentions, "Shall a child be born to him who is a hundred years old?" And it is further written, "And my lord is old also," while Jochebed would still have been an elderly woman of seventy-three when Moses was born! And should we further postpone Jochebed's birth to the end of Levi's days, the wonder of his begetting a child will be greater than that of Abraham!

But I will tell you a true principle, clearly indicated in the Torah. Scripture mentions miracles performed through a prophet and which he previously prophesied, or performed by an angel who is revealed in the course of a Divine mission, but those effected naturally in order to help the righteous or destroy the wicked are not mentioned in the Torah or in the books of the prophets. May this be "hot gold poured into the mouth" of this wise man who refuted the words of our Rabbis in the matter of Phinehas and similar matters in many places.

וְהִנֵּה פֶּן יִהְיֶה חֶכְם בְּעֵינָיו בְּסִתְיֹת דְּבָרֵי רַבּוֹתֵינוּ, אֲנִי צָרִיךְ לַעֲנוֹת אֵלָיו. וְאוֹמֵר, כִּי עַל כָּל פָּנִים יִהְיֶה בְּדָבָר יוֹכְבֵד פְּלֵא גְדוֹל מִן הַנְּסִים הַנְּסִתִּים שֶׁהֵם יְסוֹד הַתּוֹרָה, כִּי הִיא בַת לְוִי עֲצָמוֹ, לֹא מִתִּיחָסֵת אֵלָיו, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב (בַּמִּדְבָּר כ"ו נ"ט) אֲשֶׁר יִלְדָה אֶתָּה לְלוֹוִי בְּמִצְרַיִם. וְעוֹד כָּתוּב (שְׁמוֹת ו' כ') אֵת יוֹכְבֵד דָּדָתוֹ. וְהִנֵּה אִם נֹאמֵר כִּי הוֹלִיד אוֹתָהּ בְּבַחֲרוּתוֹ בְּאֲשֶׁר הוֹלִיד כָּל בְּנָיו, וְהִיתָה לִידָתָהּ אַחֵר רִדָתוֹ לְמִצְרַיִם מְעֻט, הִנֵּה הִיא בְּלֶדֶת מִשֶׁה זְקֵנָה מְאֹד כְּמִנְיָן שֶׁאִמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ אוֹ קָרוֹב לוֹ:

וְאִם יֹאמֵר שֶׁנוֹלְדָה לוֹ אַחֵר שְׁכַבְתוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם יָמִים רַבִּים, וְהִנֵּה נִחְשָׁב שֶׁהוֹלִיד אוֹתָהּ אַחֵר רִדָתוֹ לְמִצְרַיִם חֲמִשִּׁים וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנָה, וְהוּא יִהְיֶה בֶּן מֵאָה שָׁנָה, כִּי בְּרִדָתוֹ הָיָה בֶּן מ"ג שָׁנִים, וְהִנֵּה יִהְיֶה בְּזֶה שָׁנֵי פְּלֵאִים, שֶׁיִּהְיֶה הוּא זְקֵן כְּאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר הַזְּכִיר הַכָּתוּב (לְעִיל י"ז י"ז) הַלְבֵן מֵאָה שָׁנָה יוֹלֵד, וְכָתוּב (לְעִיל י"ח י"ב) וְאֵדְנִי זְקֵן, וְתִהְיֶה הִיא זְקֵנָה בְּלֶדֶת מִשֶׁה בַת ע"ג, וְאִם נֹאמֵר עוֹד לִידָתָהּ לְסוּף יָמֵי לְוִי, הִנֵּה יִהְיֶה פְּלֵא גְדוֹל מְשָׁל אַבְרָהָם:

אָבֵל אִמֵּר לָךְ דְּבָר שֶׁהוּא אֱמֶת וְכָרוּר בַּתּוֹרָה, כִּי הַנְּסִים הַנְּעֻשִׂים עַל יְדֵי נְבִיא שִׁיתְנַבֵּא בֶּן מִתְחַלֵּה אוֹ מְלֹאֵף נִגְלָה בְּמִלְאָכוֹת הַשָּׁם יִזְכִּירוּם הַכָּתוּב, וְהַנְּעֻשִׂים מֵאֲלֵהֶן לְעֹזֵר צְדִיק אוֹ לְהַכְרִית רָשָׁע לֹא יִזְכִּירוּ בַּתּוֹרָה אוֹ בַּנְּבִיאִים, וְזֶהוּ זֶהב רוֹתַח יוֹצֵק בְּפִי הַחֶכְם הַזֶּה מִמֶּה שֶׁהִשִּׁיב עַל רַבּוֹתֵינוּ בְּעֵינָן פְּנַחֵס (בַּמִּדְבָּר כ"ה י"ב) וְזוּלָתוֹ בְּמִקּוֹמוֹת הַרְבֵּה:

Why should Scripture mention hidden miracles when all the foundations of the Torah are hidden miracles. In the entire scope of the Torah there are only miracles, and no nature or custom. All assurances of the Torah are in the form of signs and wonders, as it is not natural that he who has connection with one of the forbidden degrees of marriage or he who eats forbidden fat suffers excision or death. Nor is it by nature that the heavens become as iron because we have sowed our fields in the Sabbatical year. Similarly, an the assurances of the Torah concerning those blessings [which will result from our observance of the law], and all the good fortune of the righteous ones because of their righteousness, as well as all the prayers of our king David [in the book of Psalms] and all our prayers, all are founded upon miracles and wonders, except that there is no heralded change in the nature of the world, as I have already mentioned, and I will yet explain it further, with the help of God.

I will give you faithful testimony to that which I have said. We know that from the time Israel came into the Land until the birth of our lord David, about three hundred and seventy years elapsed. These years are to be divided among four generations: Salmon, Boaz, Obed, and Jesse, each one being allotted ninety-three years. Thus when they begot children they were all approximately as old as Abraham was when he begot Isaac. Furthermore, each one begot his son in the year of his death, a most unusual thing, since in their era the general span of life was not a hundred years. And if one of them begot his son in his younger years, as is usual, the others would have had to be much older than Abraham, and thus the wonder concerning them would be exceedingly great since people in the generation of Abraham lived long, and in the days of David the average lifespan was reduced to a half.

וְלָמָּה יִזְכָּרוּם הַכְּתוּב, כֹּל יְסוּדוֹת הַתּוֹרָה
בְּנִסִּים נִסְתָּרִים הֵם. וְעַם הַתּוֹרָה
אֵין בְּכָל עֲנִינּוֹ רַק נְסִים לֹא טָבַע וּמְנַהֵג,
שְׁהָרִי יַעוּדֵי הַתּוֹרָה כָּלֵם אוֹתוֹת וּמוֹפְתִים,
כִּי לֹא יִכָּרֵת וְיָמוּת בְּטָבַע, הַבָּא עַל אַחַת
מִן הָעֲרִיּוֹת אוֹ הָאוֹכֵל חֶלֶב, וְלֹא יִהְיֶה
הַשָּׁמַיִם כְּבָרוֹז לְבִטְבָּעִם מִפְּנֵי זְרַעְנוּ בַּשָּׁנָה
הַשְּׁבִיעִית, וְכֵן כֹּל יַעוּדֵי הַתּוֹרָה בְּטוֹבוֹת
הֵהָן וְכֹל הַצְּלַחַת הַצְּדִיקִים בְּצַדִּיקְתָּם, וְכֹל
תְּפִלוֹת דָּוִד מִלְּכִנּוֹ וְכֹל תְּפִלוֹתֵינוּ נְסִים
וְנִפְלְאוֹת, אֲלֵא שְׂאִין בָּהֶם שְׁנֵי מִפְרָסִם
בְּטָבַעוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם כַּאֲשֶׁר הִזְכַּרְתִּי זֶה כְּכֹר
(לְעִיל י"ז א'), וְעוֹד אֶפְרָשְׁנוּ בְּעִזְרַת הַשֵּׁם
(שְׁמוֹת ר' ב', וַיִּקְרָא כ"ו י"א):

וְהִנֵּה אָתָּן לְךָ עַד נֶאֱמַן עַל מָה
שְׂאֵמַרְתִּי. יָדַעְנוּ, כִּי מֵעַת בּוֹא
יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֶרֶץ עַד לְדַת אֲדוֹנֵנוּ דָּוִד הָיָה
כְּשֶׁלֶשׁ מֵאוֹת וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה. וְהֵימִים
יִתְחַלְקוּ לְאַרְבָּעָה דוֹרוֹת, שְׁלֵמוֹן וּבְעִז
וְעוֹבֵד וְיֵשִׁי, וַיִּגִּיעַ לְכֹל אֶחָד מֵהֶם צ"ג
שָׁנָה, וְהִנֵּה כָּלֵם זְקֵנִים קְרוֹב לְאַבְרָהָם,
וְהָיָה מוֹלִידִים כֹּל אֶחָד בְּשָׁנַת מוֹתוֹ שְׁלֹא
כְּדָרוֹ כֹּל הָאֶרֶץ, כִּי אֵין הַחַיִּים בְּזִמְנָם
מֵאָה שָׁנָה. וְאִם הוֹלִיד אֶחָד מֵהֶם
כְּבַחְרוֹתוֹ כְּמִנְהַג, יִהְיֶה הָאַחֲרִים זְקֵנִים מְאֹד
יּוֹתֵר מֵאַבְרָהָם, וְיִהְיֶה בָּהֶם הַפְּלֵא גְדוֹל יּוֹתֵר
מְאֹד, כִּי יָמֵי הָאָדָם בְּדוֹר אַבְרָהָם אַרְבָּים,
וּבְשָׁנוֹת דָּוִד חֲזָרוּ לְמַחְצִיתָם.

And perhaps these four generations lived longer than their contemporaries for it is possible that Salmon was already advanced in years when he entered the Land of Israel, It is for this reason that the masters of Tradition, who are the true Sages, have attributed longevity to Obed, this being a covert miracle which was done the ancestor of the kingdom, the son of the righteous one, who had come to take refuge under the wings of the Divine Presence. The Sages similarly mention longevity in connection with Obed's mother, Ruth.

Now I have already explained that the wonder in the case of Abraham was not as the above mentioned Sage [Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra] and other masters of the Scriptures have thought. Abraham begot Isaac seventy-five years before his death, prior to the completion of two-thirds of his lifespan, and in all generations, old age does not affect people until three quarters of their lives have passed, just as the doctors have considered the divisions of life to be: childhood, youth, manhood, and old age. In these generations, when the lifespan is about seventy years, doctors do not consider a person aged until after sixty.

Moreover, Abraham begot many children forty years after the birth of Isaac, and the wonder is thus manifoldly miraculous! And should we say that God caused Abraham to revert to his youthful days, it may be asked why Scripture does not mention this great wonder when it was an open and known miracle which is contrary to nature.

וְאוֹלֵי חַיֵּי
 יוֹתֵר, כִּי אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁהָיוּ לְשִׁלְמוֹן יָמִים רַבִּים
 בְּבוֹאֵם לְאֶרֶץ, וְלָכֵן נִתְּנוּ אֲנָשֵׁי הַקְּבֻלָּה וְהֵם
 חֲכָמֵי אָמֶת לְעוֹבְדֵי יָמִים רַבִּים, וְהוּא גַם
 נִסְתָּר נַעֲשֶׂה לְאַבִּי הַמְּלוּכָה בֶּן הַצְּדִיקוֹת
 הַבָּאָה לְחִסּוֹת תַּחַת פְּנֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה. וְכֵן
 יִזְכְּרוּ בְּאֵמוּ אֶרֶץ יָמִים רַבִּים:

וּכְבָּר פִּרְשְׁתִּי כִּי הִפְלֵא בְּאַבְרָהָם אֵינָנו
 כְּאֲשֶׁר יַחֲשֵׁב הַחֲכָם הַנּוֹזֵקֵר וְזוּלָתוֹ
 מִבְּעֲלֵי הַמִּקְרָא, כִּי אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת
 יִצְחָק טָרַם מוֹתוֹ שִׁבְעִים וְחָמֵשׁ שָׁנָה,
 וְהִנֵּה לֹא עָבְרוּ עָלָיו שְׁנֵי חֲלָקִים בְּיָמָיו,
 וְהָאֲנָשִׁים בְּכָל דּוֹר אֵין הַזְקָנָה בָּהֶם עַד
 עֲבוּר עֲלֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשֶׁת חֲלָקֵי יְמוֹתָם, כְּאֲשֶׁר
 יַחֲשִׁבוּ הַרוֹפְאִים הַיְלָדוֹת וְהַבְּחִירוֹת
 וְהָאִישׁוֹת וְהַזְקָנָה. וּבְדוֹרוֹת הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר
 הֵימָּיִם בָּהֶם כְּשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה לֹא יַחֲשִׁבוּ לוֹ
 הַרוֹפְאִים זָקֵן עַד אַחַר שָׁשִׁים:

וְעוֹד כִּי אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד בָּנִים רַבִּים אַחֲרָי
 אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה מִלְּדַת יִצְחָק, וַיְהִי
 הִפְלֵא כְּפִלֵי כְּפָלִים. וְאִם נֹאמֵר שֶׁחֲחִזְרוּ
 הָאֵל לִימֵי בַחֲוֹרוֹתָיו יִקְשֶׁה עָלָיו, כִּי לֹא
 הַזְכִּיר הַפְּתוּב הִפְלֵא הַגְּדוֹל הַזֶּה, וְהוּא גַם
 גָּלוּי וּמְפֹרָס בְּהַפְּךָ מִן הַטָּבַע:

Moreover, it is known that in this present generation some men beget children until they are full seventy or eighty years old and more, depending upon the extent to which they retain their natural vitality. Women also have no specific time [for ceasing to conceive], as long as they have their period they can give birth. However, the wonder in the case of Abraham and Sarah, as I explained there, was due to the fact that they had not begotten children in their younger years, and now together they begot a child. In the case of Sarah there was an additional wonder, i.e., *that the manner of women* had ceased with her, and after this happens, women no longer give birth.

Now if Jochebed lived as many years as her father Levi had, and if her vitality remained with her until near her old age, as is the way of women, it would be no wonder if she gave birth at the time set forth by our Rabbis, [namely, at one hundred and thirty years of age]. It is because God wanted to redeem Israel though the brothers [Moses and Aaron], and since the time of the redemption had not yet come, He delayed their birth many years until their mother was old. Nothing is too difficult for the Eternal.

וּמִן הַיָּדוּעַ כִּי הָאֲנָשִׁים בְּדוֹר הַזֶּה, מֵהֶם שְׂוִלֵדוֹ בְּזִקְנָתָם עַד מְלֵאת שְׁבָעִים שָׁנָה אוֹ שְׁמוֹנִים שָׁנָה וְיֹתֵר, כְּפִי הַתְּקוּמָה בָּהֶם הַלְּחֹת לְפִי טַבְעָם. וְגַם הַנְּשִׂים אֵין לָהֶם זְמַן, וְכָל עוֹד הָיוֹת לָהֶן הָאֲרֻחַ תִּלְדָּנָה, רַק הַתִּימָה בְּאַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה כְּאֲשֶׁר פִּרְשֵׁתִי שָׁם, מִפְּנֵי שְׁלֹא הוֹלִידוּ בְּנִעוּרֵיהֶם וְעַתָּה הוֹלִידוּ זֶה מִזֶּה. וְעוֹד בְּשָׂרָה הָיָה פְּלֵא כִּי חֹדֵל מִמְּנָה אֲרֻחַ כְּנָשִׁים וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן לֹא תִלְדָּנָה:

וְהִנֵּה אִם יִהְיוּ יָמֵי יוֹכָבֵד כִּימֵי אָבִיהָ, וְחַתָּקִים בָּהּ הַלְּחֹת עַד קָרוֹב לְזִקְנָתָה כְּמִשְׁפֵּט הַנְּשִׁים, אֵינָנו פְּלֵא אִם תּוֹלִיד בְּזְמַן אֲשֶׁר נָתַנוּ לָהּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ, מִפְּנֵי שְׂרָצָה הָאֱלֹהִים לְגֹאֵל אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל יְדֵי הָאֲחִים הָאֱלֹהִים וְלֹא הִגִּיעַ הַקֶּץ, אַחֵר לְדָתָם יָמִים רַבִּים עַד כִּי זָקְנָה אִמָּם. וְלֹא יִפְּלֵא מֵה' דָּבָר:

THE CHILDREN OF LEAH

REUBEN (1)

HANOCH (2), PALLU (3), HEZRON (4), CARMİ (5)

SIMEON (6)

JEMUEL (7), JAMIN (8), OHAD (9), JACHIN (10), ZOHAR (11), SHAUL (12)

LEVI (13)

GERSHON (14), KOHATH (15), MERARI (16) (JOCHEBED)

JUDAH (17)

ER (X), ONAN (X), SHELAN (18), PEREZ (19), ZERAH (20), HEZRON (21), HAMUL (22)

ISSACHAR (23)

TOLA (24), PUVAH (25), IOB (26), SHIMRON (27)

ZEBULUN (28)

SERED (29), ELON (30), JAHLEEL (31)

DINAH (32)