



## Peshat and Derash in the Book of Genesis

How do Jews read the Hebrew Bible? We have been provided with many avenues to understand the text, including the grasping the simple meaning of the text (פֶּשֶׁט) as well as possible interpretive meanings (דֶּרֶשׁ). This course is designed to approach various sections of the book of Breisheet (Genesis) through the lenses of the Peshat (simple meaning) and Derash (interpretive meaning). Our goal is not to find the ‘truth’ of the meaning of the text, but rather to explore some of the possible explanations of what the text is attempting to communicate in a more expanded read.

Interpreting the text comes about very often as a result of many phenomena identified in the text. A non-exhaustive list of textual challenges includes: Ambiguity, repetition, contradictions, superfluity, redundancy, chronology, redundancy, geography, etymology, lacunae, spelling, grammar, unusual words and phrases, etc. When the text presents a narrative which contains one or more of these phenomena, one approach to better understand the text is to react to the anomalies by way of story or imaginative explanation.

In the context of these imaginative interpretations, the rabbis who offer them are also able to teach ethics, encourage their readers to love God, the Jewish people and humanity, reject evil and get across many other messages, some overt and some covert. In our time together, we hope to learn some Torah through two prisms – one simple (peshat) and one interpretive (derash). Now let’s go learn!

Breisheet is a great text from which to learn derash, simply because it is filled with narrative (as opposed to legal texts). The stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs are open to interpretation, as their actions can be understood in multiple ways, simply because the Narrator has chosen (most of the time) not to share with the reader/listener the motivation behind the words, thoughts or deeds of the characters. (An exception to this can be found in Genesis 34: 13 in the story of the rape of Dinah.)

### Genesis 34: 13

<p>13. Jacob’s sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor—speaking <b>with guile</b> because he had defiled their sister Dinah— 14. and said to them, “We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised, for that is a disgrace among us.</p>	<p>13. וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב אֶת־שָׁכֶם וְאֶת־חָמֹר אָבִיו בְּמַרְמָה וַיֹּדְבִירוּ אֲשֶׁר טָמְאָה אֶת־דִּינָה אֲחֹתָם: 14. וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֵיהֶם לֹא נוֹכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְתַתּוֹת אֶת־אֲחֹתֵנוּ לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ עֶרְלָה כִּי־חֲרָפָה הוּא לָנוּ:</p>
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## I. Abraham Saved from the Fire

### Genesis 15: 7

7. Then He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to assign this land to you as a possession."	7. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאוּר כַּשְׁדִּים לָתֶת לְךָ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְרִשְׁתָּהּ:
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### Rabbeinu Bahya ben Asher – Spain (1255-1340)

"I am the Lord Who has taken you out of Ur Casdim, etc." According to Nachmanides G'd referred to the time commencing with His saving Avram miraculously from the furnace of Nimrod. Ever since Avram had enjoyed G'd's goodwill and He had intended to give the land of Canaan to him.	<b>אני ה' אשר הוצאתיך מאור כשדים וגו'.</b> פ"י הרמב"ן ז"ל מעת אשר הוצאתיך מאור כשדים ועשיתי לך נס היה הרצון לפני לתת לך הארץ הזאת.
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### Rabbi David Kimhi – Spain (1255-1340)

אשר הוצאתיך מאור כשדים, it was not for nothing that I have taken you out of that environment, but in order to give you this land to inherit it. God meant that Avram's descendants would inherit the land of Canaan. The relationship between this land and Avram would become comparable to the inheritance a father leaves to his sons.	אשר הוצאתיך, ולא לחנם הוצאתיך אלא לתת לך את הארץ הזאת לרשתה, רצה לומר שיירשוה בניו ותהיה הארץ לאברהם כמו הירושה שיורישנה אדם לבניו:
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From Rabbeinu Bahya: According to a comment in the Sefer Hayashar at the time Avram was born a certain star in the eastern sky "swallowed" four other stars in four directions of the sky. At that time Nimrod's advisors said to him: "at this moment a son has been born to Terach whose descendants will produce a nation which will inherit the whole earth as



well as the hereafter. If you agree, let us give his father a house full of gold and silver and get his permission to kill the baby.” Thereupon Nimrod immediately sent an urgent message to Terach in which he referred to the baby who had been born to Terach on the previous evening and demanded that it be handed over to be killed. In return he promised Terach a house full of gold and silver... Thereupon Terach hid the baby in a cave for the next three years...

When Avram was three years old he left the cave. When he looked around he began to wonder who had created heaven and the earth and himself. At first he began praying to the sun all day long. Then, at night, when he saw the moon, he began to pray to the moon as he had concluded that the position of the moon in the sky was proof that the moon had created it and the stars as well as earth and himself. He considered the stars as servants of the moon. When the moon disappeared in the morning and the sun rose in the East he began to realise that the phenomena he had observed thus far had only been tools in the hands of someone mightier than either of them. He now went to his father Terach and asked him who had created heaven earth and himself? Terach answered him: “my god created all these phenomena.” Thereupon Avram asked his father to show him this god who supposedly was powerful enough to have created all these phenomena. Terach brought him one of his idols. Avram could not accept that this idol had any power at all. He went to his mother asking her similar questions. He asked his mother to cook a fancy dish so that he could offer it to one of the idols hoping it would be accepted as an offering. He placed the food in front of Terach’s biggest idol. The idol did not respond at all, neither by sign or movement of his eyes or other organs. At that point, Avram had some divine inspiration and he said of these idols *עינים להם ולא יראו*, “they have a mouth and are unable to speak, they have eyes but are unable to see” ([Psalms 115,5](#)). He seized the idols and burned them. He took the largest idol outside and placed the fire in his hand. When his father came home and wanted to know what had happened, Avram accused the biggest idol of having burned the others. Terach accused Avram of having burned his idols. Avram claimed to be innocent accusing the largest idols of having burned the others in a fit of fury. Thereupon his father said to him: “my son, you are foolish, how can any of these lifeless idols do such a thing? I myself have made these idols out of wood.” Thereupon Avram said to his father: “I wish you would hear yourself talk. If they have no power why did you tell me that they have created heaven and earth?”

Terach then went to Nimrod and told him that his son had burned both his own and Nimrod’s idols. Nimrod sent for Avram and asked him why he done such a thing. Avram denied having done anything and blamed the largest of the idols for having burned the others. Thereupon Nimrod also challenged him by saying: “since when do these idols possess a spirit of life enabling them to act?” Avram then told Nimrod more or less the same as he had told his father, adding: “why do you reduce the god who has created heaven



and earth to a wooden image and you worship such an image?” Thereupon Nimrod told Avram that he personally had created heaven and earth and that both heaven and earth were under his control.

Thereupon Avram said to Nimrod: “You are able to create? when I came out of the cave I saw the sun rise in the east and set in the west. If you can make the sun rise in the west and set in the east I will worship you. If you are unable to do this, the one who gave me the power to burn the idols will also give me the power to kill you.” Upon hearing this Nimrod consulted with his advisors and asked them what to do with Avram? Thereupon the advisors told him: “this is the one concerning whom we have told you that he will become the founder of a nation which will take over the entire universe including the hereafter. Now the only thing you can do is to do to him what he has done to those idols which he burned.” Upon hearing the advice of his councilors Nimrod immediately threw Avram into a fiery furnace. At that point, God was filled with mercy for the boy and He saved him. This is the meaning of His words to Avram: “I have taken you out of the fire of the Casdim.”

It is on the basis of this midrash that Bahya and Ramban derive the idea that Abraham was saved from a fire into which he was thrown by Nimrod. Please see: Isaiah 44:16, 47:14, 50:11 for a clear understanding of the ‘fire’ ostensibly referred to in Genesis 15:7.

Speaking of Nimrod, where does Nimrod come from? The first reference to this man is in Genesis 10:8-12.

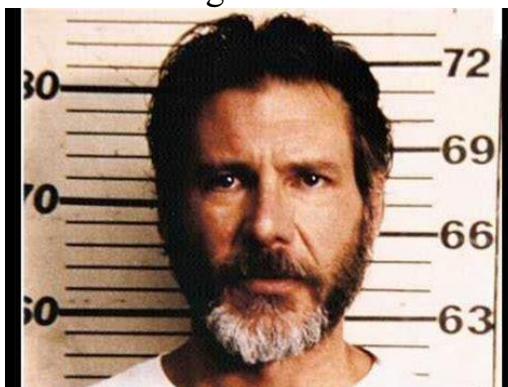
#### Genesis 15: 7

<p>8. Cush also begot Nimrod, who was the first man of might on earth. 9. He was a mighty hunter by the grace of the LORD; hence the saying, “Like Nimrod a mighty hunter by the grace of the LORD.” 10. The mainstays of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar. 11. From that land Asshur went forth and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, 12. and Resen between Nineveh and Calah, that is the great city.</p>	<p>8. וְכוֹשׁ יָלַד אֶת־נִמְרוֹד הוּא הָחַל לְהִלּוֹת גִּבּוֹר בְּאַרְצָא: 9. הוּא־הָיָה גִּבּוֹר־צֹדֵד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה עַל־כֵּן יֵאמָר כְּנִמְרוֹד גִּבּוֹר צֹדֵד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: 10. וַתְּהִי רֹאשִׁית מַמְלַכְתּוֹ בָּבֶל וְאַרְדּוֹ וְאַכַּד וְכַלְנֶה בְּאַרְצָא שִׁנְעָר: 11. מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַהִיא יָצָא אֲשׁוּר וַיִּבֶן אֶת־נִינְוֶה וְאֶת־רְחוֹבֹת עִיר וְאֶת־כַּלַּח: 12. וְאֶת־רֶסֶן בֵּין נִינְוֶה וּבֵין כַּלַּח הוּא הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה:</p>
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## Targum Onkelos and Rashi to Genesis 10: 9 on Nimrod

Onkelos	Rashi	Onkelos	יט, הוּא הָיָה גִּבּוֹר-צִיד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה עַל-כֵּן יִאָמֵר כְּנֻמְרָד גִּבּוֹר צִיד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה:
<p>— גִּבּוֹר תְּקִיף — he was a strong giant before the Lord; <b>Rashi</b> - גִּבּוֹר צִיד A MIGHTY HUNTER — He ensnared the minds of people by his words, misleading them to rebel against the Omnipresent; BEFORE THE LORD — intending purposely to provoke Him to His face.</p>	<p>גִּבּוֹר צִיד. צִיד דְּעֵתָן שֶׁל בְּרִיּוֹת בְּפִיו, וּמִטְעֵן לְמַרְד בְּמִקּוֹם: לִפְנֵי ה'. מִתְכַּנֵּן לְהַקְנִיטוֹ עַל פָּנָיו:</p>	<p>הוּא הָיָה גִּבּוֹר תְּקִיף קָדָם יי; עַל כֵּן, יִתְאַמֵּר, כְּנֻמְרָד גִּבּוֹר תְּקִיף קָדָם יי.</p>	

## II. Who was the 'Fugitive' of Genesis 14: 13?



### Genesis 14: 12-14

<p>12. They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, and his possessions, and departed; for he had settled in Sodom. 13. A <b>fugitive</b> brought the news to Abram the Hebrew, who was dwelling at the terebinths of Mamre the Amorite, kinsman of Eshkol and Aner, these being Abram's allies. 14. When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he mustered his retainers, born into his household, numbering three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.</p>	<p>12. וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת-לוֹט וְאֶת-רֶכֶשׁוֹ בְּרֵאֲחֵי אַבְרָם וַיֵּלְכוּ וְהוּא יוֹשֵׁב בְּסֻדָּם: 13. וַיָּבֹא הַפְּלִיט וַיַּגֵּד לְאַבְרָם הָעֵבֶרִי וְהוּא שָׁכַן בְּאַלְנֵי מִמְרָא הָאֲמֹרִי אֲחִי אֶשְׁכֵּל וְאֲחֵי עֲנָר וְהֵם בְּעָלֵי בְרִית-אַבְרָם: 14. וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם כִּי נִשְׁבָּה אֲחִיו וַיִּרְקַח אֶת-חֲנִיכָיו וְלִידֵי בֵיתוֹ שְׂמֹנֶה עָשָׂר וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וַיִּרְדֹּף עַד-דָּן:</p>
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## Rashi to Genesis 14: 13

ויבא הפליט AND THERE CAME THE ONE WHO ESCAPED — According to the real meaning this was Og who had escaped from the battle with the Rephaim (see [Genesis 14:5](#)) and it is to this that the text refers ([Deuteronomy 3:11](#)) “For only Og king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim”, and this is what is meant by “left”, for Amraphel and his allies did not kill him when they smote the Rephaim in Ashteroth Karnaim... Or... it refers to Og in allusion to him as the only one of the generation of the Flood who escaped that catastrophe, and this is what is meant ([Deuteronomy 3:11](#)) “of the remnant of the Rephaim”, for it is said. ([Genesis 6:4](#)) “The Nephilim (= Rephaim cf. [Genesis Rabbah 26](#)) were in the earth etc.” His intention in telling Abraham that his nephew was captured was that Abraham should wage war against the kings and that he should be killed so that he, himself, might marry Sarah.

**ויבא הפליט.** לפי פשוטו זה עוג, שפלט מן המלחמה, והוא שכתוב כי רק עוג נשאר מיתר הרפאים (דבר' ג') וזהו נשאר, שלא הרגוהו אמרפל וחבריו כשהכו הרפאים בעשתרות קרנים... זה עוג, שפלט מדור המבול; וזהו מיתר הרפאים, שנאמר הנפלים היו בארץ וגו' (לעיל ו') ומתכונן שיהרג אברם וישא את שרה:

## Hizkuni – Hezekiah ben Manoah (13<sup>th</sup> century France) to Genesis 14: 13

ויבא הפליט, “the one who had escaped Kedorleomer’s army arrived,” according to Rashi’s commentary this was the man who later on became Og, King of Bashan who had made a name for himself by having survived the deluge (Bavli Niddah 61a), hence the prefix ה before the word: פליט, escapee. He lived so long that eventually Moses killed him ([Numbers 21,35](#)) He was not interested in saving Avram, but intended to marry Sarah after Avram would have been killed in war. G-d retaliated by paying him back in kind. He granted him long life for warning Avram on the one hand, but He foiled his design, Avram becoming victorious, and Sarah predeceasing Avram. He was chagrined to live long enough to see millions of Avram’s descendants, before

**ויבא הפליט.** פרש"י זה עוג שפלט מדור המבול. מדרש אגדה מה שהאריך ימים כל כך מימי נח עד משה שמרע"ה הרגו אלא לפי שהיה מתכוין שיהרג אברהם והוא ישא את שרה אמר לו הקב"ה חייך שכל פסיעותיך אתה נוטל שאתה מאריך ימים בעולם אבל על שחשבת להרוג את הצדיק חייך שאתה רואה אלף אלפים ורבי רבבות מבניו ואין סופו של אותו האיש ליפול אלא בידם שנאמר ויאמר ה' אל משה אל תירא אותו וגו' ב"ר. חז"ק היאך פלט עוג למ"ד בני א"י מתו מהבלא בשעת המבול. ובפסיקתא דר' אליעזר זה מיכאל, שבשעה

<p>himself being killed by one of them... The verse which omits identifying who this escapee was is not so unusual that we need to look for far fetched explanations. Our author cites similar “abbreviated” constructions in <a href="#">Genesis 48,1</a>; <a href="#">Genesis 48,2</a>; he claims that there are numerous others.</p>	<p>שהפיל הקב"ה את סמאל והכת שלו ממקום קדושתו ותפס בכנפי מיכאל להפילו עמו ופלטו הקב"ה ולכך נקרא שמו פליט ועליו אמר יחזקאל בא אלי הפליט. <u>ופשוטו איש אחד שנפלט מן המלחמה, והמקרא קצר כמו ויאמר ליוסף, ויגד ליעקב, ועוד הרבה.</u></p>
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### Berisheet Rabbah 42: 8

<p>The refugee came – Reish Lakish in the name of Bar Kappara: Og is the refugee. Why was he called ‘Og’? When he delivered his message to Abraham that Lot had been captured, he found Abraham making cakes (עוגות) (see Gen. 18:6). Og said to himself, ‘Abraham is a vengeful man. I will tell him that his nephew has been captive and he will go to war and get killed and I will marry his wife. The Divine said to him, you informed Abraham regarding your nephew, and for that I will give you length of days. Because you tried to have Abraham killed, I will make you see the many, many descendants that will emerge from that couple.</p>	<p>וַיָּבֹא הַפְּלִיט (בראשית יד, יג) רִישׁ לְקִישׁ בְּשֵׁם בַּר קַפְרָא הוּא עוֹג הוּא פְּלִיט, וְלָמָּה נִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ עוֹג שֶׁבָּא וּמָצָא אֶת אַבְרָם יוֹשֵׁב וְעוֹסֵק בְּמִצּוֹת עוֹגוֹת, הוּא לֹא נִתְּכֵן לְשֵׁם שָׂמִים אֶלָּא אָמַר אַבְרָהָם זֶה קוֹנִיּוֹן הוּא, וְעָכְשׁוּ אֲנִי אוֹמֵר לוֹ נִשְׁבָּה בֶּן אֲחִידָה וְהוּא יוֹצֵא לְמַלְחָמָה וְנִהְרָג וְאֲנִי נוֹטֵל אֶת שְׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ. אָמַר לוֹ הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא חֲתִידָה שְׂכַר פְּסִיעוֹתֶיךָ אֶתָּה נוֹטֵל שְׂאֵת מֵאֲרִיךְ יָמִים בְּעוֹלָם, וְעַל שֶׁחֲשַׁבְתָּ לְהַרְגֵּנִי אֶת הַצְדִּיק חֲתִידָה שְׂאֵתָה רֹאֶה אֶלְפִים וְרַבִּי רַבְבוֹת מִבְּנֵי בְנָיו.</p>
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Og, the King of Bashan (at the time of Moses) was the ‘remnant of the Refaim’ (Deut. 3:11) who are called ‘Anakim’ (giants) (ibid, 2:11) who are synonymous with the ‘Nefilim’ (Num. 13:33) who lived at the time of the creation of the world (Gen. 6:4). He is called the ‘remnant’ because he survived the four kings against the five (Gen. 14:5). This is how the Midrash is able to call Og the ‘refugee’ (‘remnant’) in Gen. 14:13.

Nefilim = Anakim = Refaim



### Deuteronomy 3: 11

11. Only King <b>Og</b> of Bashan was <b>left of the remaining Rephaim</b> . His bedstead, an iron bedstead, is now in Rabbah of the Ammonites; it is nine cubits long and four cubits wide, by the standard cubit!	11. כִּי רַק־עֹוג מֶלֶךְ הַבָּשָׁן נִשְׁאַר מִיְתֵר הַרְפָּאִים הִנֵּה עֶרְשׁוֹ עֶרֶשׁ בְּרֹזֶל הָלָה הוּא בְּרֶבֶת בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן תִּשַׁע אַמּוֹת אָרְכָּה וְאַרְבַּע אַמּוֹת רָחְבָּהּ בְּאַמַּת־אִישׁ :
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### Deuteronomy 2: 11

11. Like the <b>Anakites</b> , they are counted as <b>Rephaim</b> ; but the Moabites call them Emim.	11. וְרָפָאִים יִחְשְׁבוּ אֹהֵיהֶם כְּעַנְקִים וְהַמּוֹאבִּים יִקְרְאוּ לָהֶם אַמִּים :
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### Numbers 13: 33

5. We saw the Nephilim there—the <b>Anakites are part of the Nephilim</b> —and we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves, and so we must have looked to them.”	5. וַשֵּׁם רָאִינוּ אֶת־הַנְּפִילִים בְּנֵי עֲנָק מְרֵה־נְפִלִים וַנְּהִי בְעֵינֵינוּ כְּחִגְבִּים וְכֹן הָיִינוּ בְעֵינֵיהֶם :
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### Genesis 6: 4

4. It was then, and later too, that the <b>Nephilim</b> appeared on earth—when the divine beings cohabited with the daughters of men, who bore them offspring. They were the heroes of old, the men of renown.	4. הַנְּפִלִים הָיוּ בָאָרֶץ בְּיָמֵים הָהֵם וְגַם אַחֲרֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר יָבֹאוּ בְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל־בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם וַיֵּלְדוּ לָהֶם הֵמָּה הַגִּבּוֹרִים אֲשֶׁר מֵעוֹלָם אֲנִשִּׁי הַשָּׁם :
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### Genesis 14: 5

5. In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim at Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim at Ham, the Emim at Shaveh-kiriathaim.	5. וּבְאַרְבַּע עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה בָּא כְדֻרְלַעְמֶר וְהַמֶּלְכִּים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ וַיִּכּוּ אֶת־רָפָאִים בְּעֶשְׂתֵּתִית קַרְנַיִם וְאֶת־הַזּוּזִים בְּהָם וְאֶת־הָאִמִּים בְּשָׁוֶה קִרְיַתַּיִם :
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In response to what Abraham heard from the ‘refugee’, Abraham gathered together 318 men to rescue Lot. What is the significance of the number 318? Why did the Torah choose to give us that particular number?

### Gilukhepa

The Gilukhepa scarab commemorates the arrival of Princess Gilukhepa, daughter of [Shuttarna II](#) of [Mitanni](#) into the harem of Amenhotep III in the 10th year of his reign. Recorded on the scarab is her retinue of 317 ladies-in-waiting who accompanied her as she joined the pharaoh’s harem. The total number of women to enter the harem of King Amenhotep III, including the princess, is 318. The time of the reign of Amenhotep III is estimated to be the fourteenth century BCE, not long after what is considered the period of the patriarchs of our Hebrew Bible.



### The Iliad

In Homer’s Iliad, there is a section which records the casualties that came about as a result of four days of relentless fighting. For each day the numbers slain are enumerated, and the tally after four days comes to a total of 318. Scholars have suggested that the Iliad was written around the 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE.

Bible scholar Stanley Gevirtz, at a conference of the Society of Biblical Literature in December, 1968 stated, “Of course, that 318 is the given number of Abram’s retainers, the count of Mitannian maidens in the bridal party, the sum total of fatalities registered by Homer in The Iliad... may well be no more than sheer coincidence. But is it?

Breisheet Rabbah 44:9 to Genesis 14:14

<p>Reish Lakish said in the name of Bar Kappara, “Abraham said, ‘the one in charge of my household is Dammeseq Eliezer.’” (Gen. 15:2) He pursued the kings up to Damascus, as it is written, ‘He mustered his retainers, born into his household, numbering 318...’ (ibid, 14:14). The Gematria of Eliezer is 318 (1+30+10+70+7+200 = 318).</p>	<p>רִישׁ לָקִישׁ בְּשֵׁם בַּר קַפָּרָא אָמַר בֶּן מִשֶּׁק בֵּיתִי, בַּר בֵּיתִי הוּא אֱלִיעֶזֶר, שְׁעַל יָדוֹ רִדְפָתִי מְלָכִים עַד דַּמֶּשֶׁק, וְאֱלִיעֶזֶר הָיָה שְׁמוֹ, שְׁנַאמֶר (בְּרֵאשִׁית יד, י): (וַיִּרְקֶה אֶת חֲנִיכָיו וַיְלִידֵי בֵיתוֹ שְׁמֹנֶה עָשָׂר וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת, מִבְּנֵי אֱלִיעֶזֶר הָיָה שְׁמֹנֶה עָשָׂר וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת.</p>
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## Nedarim 32a

<p>The Torah states that he took “eighteen and three hundred” (<a href="#">Genesis 14:14</a>) men to war. Rabbi Ami bar Abba said: Eliezer was equivalent to all of them. There are those who say: Only Eliezer is referred to here, as the numerical value of the letters of his name is this amount, i.e., 318.</p>	<p>שִׁמְנָה עָשָׂר וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת <u>בְּרֵאשִׁית יֵד</u>, <u>יֵד</u> אָמַר רַבִּי אָמִי בַר אֲבָא אֱלִיעֶזֶר כִּנְגַד כּוֹלָם אֵיכָא דְאִמְרֵי אֱלִיעֶזֶר הוּא דְּחוֹשְׁבָנִיה הֵכִי הוּי</p>
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If you take the twelve prime numbers between 7 and  $7^2$ , what do you get? Well, let's try it:  $7+11+13+17+19+23+29+31+37+41+43+47=318$ . This points to the idea that perhaps the number had a symbolic rather than historical value.

Consider this, then regarding one of the strangest tales about the prophet Elisha:

## 2 Kings 2:23-24

<p>23. From there he went up to Bethel. As he was going up the road, some little boys came out of the town and jeered at him, saying, “Go away, baldhead! Go away, baldhead!” 24. He turned around and looked at them and cursed them in the name of the LORD. Thereupon, two she-bears came out of the woods and mangled forty-two of the children.</p>	<p>23. וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁם בֵּית־אֵל וְהוּא   עָלָה בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיִּנְעָרִים קְטָנִים יֶזְאוּ מִן־הָעִיר וַיִּתְּקִלְסוּבוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ עָלָה קַרְחַם עָלָה קַרְחַם: 24. וַיָּפֹן אַחֲרָיו וַיִּרְאֵם וַיִּקְלֹלֵם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה וַתֵּצֵאנָה שְׁתֵּי דִבֵּי־מֶרְ הַיַּעַר וַתִּבְקַעַנָה מֵהֶם אַרְבָּעִים וּשְׁנַיִ יְלָדִים:</p>
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Why are we told that the number of children killed by these she-bears is 42? Gevirtz suggests that we take the first seven prime numbers, add them together and what do we get? Let's try it:  $1+2+3+5+7+11+13=42$  of course! So while the numbers 42 and 318 seem random, but necessarily chosen to 'add' to these stories, their choice may be more contrived than originally thought. Or not...

If we are already into the numbers game, let's go with another Gematria that provides a great basis to explain the piety of our forefather Jacob. Recalling that the Torah/Ten Commandments/Mitzvot were not given to the Children of Israel until the theophany on Mt. Sinai following their exodus from Egypt, how many mitzvot could Jacob have observed?



### III. Jacob's Life in Aram Naharaim

#### Genesis 32:4-5

4. Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, 5. and instructed them as follows, "Thus shall you say, 'To my lord Esau, thus says your servant Jacob: <b>I stayed</b> with Laban and remained until now;	4. וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו אֶל־עֵשָׂו אָחִיו אֲרָצָה שְׂעִיר שְׂדֵה אֱדוֹם: 5. וַיֹּצֵא אֹתָם לֵאמֹר כֹּה תֹאמְרוּן לְאֲדֹנָי לְעֹשֹׂו כֹּה אָמַר עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב עִם־לָבָן גֵּרְתִּי וְאַחֵר עַד־עַתָּה:
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#### Rashi to Genesis 32:5

I HAVE SOJOURNED — I have become neither a prince nor other person of importance but merely a sojourner. It is not worth your while to hate me on account of the blessing of your father who blessed me (27:29) "Be master over thy brethren", for it has not been fulfilled in me (Tanchuma Yashan 1:8:5). <u>Another explanation:</u> the word גרתי has the numerical value of 613 - תרי"ג - it is as much as to say, "Though I have sojourned with Laban, the wicked, I have observed the מצות תרי"ג, the 613 Divine Commandments, and I have learned naught of his evil ways.	גרתי. לא נַעֲשִׂיתִי שָׂר וְחָשׁוּב אֶלָּא גֵר, אֵינְךָ כְּדָאִי לְשֹׂנְאֵי אוֹתִי עַל בְּרַכַּת אַבְיָךְ שֶׁבִּרְכַּנִּי הָיָה גִבּוֹר לְאַחִידָה, שֶׁהָרִי לֹא נִתְקַיְמָה בִּי. ד"א גֵּרְתִּי בְּגִימָטְרִיָּא תַרִּי"ג, כְּלֹמֶר, עִם לָבָן גֵּרְתִּי וְתַרִּי"ג מִצְוֹת שֶׁמִּרְתִּי וְלֹא לְמִדַּתִּי מִמַּעֲשָׂיו הָרָעִים:
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#### Joseph ben Isaac Bechor Shor (late 12<sup>th</sup> century France) to Genesis 32:5

I sojourned with Lavan. That is to say, I only left my father's house in order to make some money.	עם לבן גרתי. כלו' לא יצאתי מבית אבי אלא להשתכר ולהרויח:
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#### Rashbam to Genesis 32:5

I STAYED WITH LAVAN. As you know, at the instruction of my father and my mother. This so that he [Esav] would not think, "He fled on account of me."	עם לבן גרתי - כאשר ידעת במצות אבי ואמי שלא יחשוב בשבילי ברח.
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Who else could observe the Mitzvot even though they had yet to be bestowed upon the Children of Israel? We can surmise that Abraham and Sarah were not only Mitzvah observers, but they were also likely engaged in the teaching of the commandments to the idolatrous population living in their midst prior to their setting off for Canaan at the behest of the Divine.

#### IV. Abraham and Sarah 'Making' Souls in Haran

##### Genesis 12:5

5. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons that they had <b>acquired</b> in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan,	5. וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת־שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־לוֹט בְּרֹאֲחוֹ וְאֶת־כָּל־רְכוּשׁוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁוּ וְאֶת־הַנַּפְשׁ אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן וַיֵּצְאוּ לָלֶכֶת אֶרֶצָה כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶצָה כְּנָעַן :
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##### Rashi to Genesis 12:5

אשר עשו בחרן [THE SOULS] THAT THEY HAD GOTTEN (literally, made) IN HARAN — The souls which he had brought beneath the sheltering wings of the Shechinah. Abraham converted the men and Sarah converted the women and Scripture accounts it unto them as if they had made them. However, the real sense of the text is that it refers to the men-servants and to the maidservants whom they had acquired for themselves. The word "עשה" is used here as (in <a href="#">Genesis 31:1</a> ), "he has acquired (עשה) all this wealth", and ( <a href="#">Numbers 24:8</a> ), "And Israel acquires (עושה) wealth" — an expression for acquiring and amassing.	אשר עשו בחרן. שֶׁהִכְנִיסוֹן תַּחַת כְּנָפֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה; אַבְרָהָם מְגִיר אֶת הָאֲנָשִׁים וְשָׂרָה מְגִיֶּרֶת הַנָּשִׁים, וּמַעֲלָה עֲלֵיהֶם הַכְּתוּב כְּאִלוּ עָשְׂאוּם; וּפְשׁוּטוֹ שֶׁל מִקְרָא עֲבָדִים וְשִׁפְחוֹת שֶׁקָּנוּ לָהֶם, כְּמוֹ עָשָׂה אֶת כָּל הַכֶּבֶד הַזֶּה; וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל עָשָׂה חֵיל, לָשׂוֹן קוֹנָה וְכוּנִים :
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##### Ibn Ezra to Genesis 12:5

ואת הנפש: locally born servants. עשו: like 'acquired'. As in, 'allowed me to acquire this	ואת הנפש. עבדים ילידי בית. או עשו. כמו קנו. וכן עשה לי את החיל
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wealth.' (Deut. 8:17) There are those who say that the souls were those whom they taught the truth about worshipping God.	הזה. ויש אומרים הנפשות שהורם האמת לעבוד את השם.
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### Radak-Rabbi David Kimhi (France, 1160-1235) to Genesis 12:5

<p>וְאֵת הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בַּחֲרוֹן, וְאֵת הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בַּחֲרוֹן, the male and female servants they had acquired in Charan. The word עָשׂוּ must be understood as similar to <a href="#">Deuteronomy 8:17</a> עָשָׂה לִי אֵת כָּל הַחֵיִל הַזֶּה, "has gotten me this wealth." According to Onkelos, the word עָשׂוּ refers to the people whom Avram and Lot had succeeded in bringing back to monotheism, i.e. the same religion as that professed by Avram. Lot too, professed the belief in the one and only invisible God, the Creator of the universe Lot did not merely join Avram because he was his uncle and much younger than his grandfather, but he shared his religious beliefs and was active as an evangelist for that faith himself. This is the reason why the Torah wrote the word עָשׂוּ in the plural mode instead of the singular. According to our sages (<a href="#">Bereshit Rabbah 39,14</a>) the plural mode of the word עָשׂוּ is meant to prove that both Avram and Sarai, each were active in converting their respective friends to monotheism. The use of the root עָשָׂה to describe such "brainwashing," is also found in <a href="#">Samuel I 12,6</a> אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֵת מֹשֶׁה וְאֵת אַהֲרֹן, where it refers to God having been the mentor of both Moses and Aaron.</p>	<p><b>וְאֵת הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בַּחֲרוֹן, הָעֲבָדִים</b> וְהַשְּׁפָחוֹת שֶׁקָּנוּ בַּחֲרוֹן, וַיְהִיָּה עָשׂוּ כְּמוֹ עָשָׂה לִי אֵת הַחֵיִל הַזֶּה. וְדַעַת אוֹנְקֵלוֹס עַל אוֹתָם הָאֲנָשִׁים שֶׁהַחֲזִירוּ לְאִמּוּנָה טוֹבָה הִיא אִמּוּנַת אַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ, כִּי לוֹט הָיָה מֵאִמּוּנָתוֹ לִפְיֶכֶךְ נִתְחַבֵּר עִמּוֹ, וְהוּא גַם כֵּן הָיָה קוֹרֵא לְאֲנָשִׁים וּמְרָאָה לְהֵם טַעֲמִים שִׁיאֲמִינוּ בִּה' וַיַּעֲבִדוּ אוֹתוֹ לְבָדּוֹ וְלֹא הִגְלוּלִים לִפְיֶכֶךְ אָמַר אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ וְלֹא אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה. וְרַז"ל דָּרְשׁוּ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ עַל אַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָי, הוּא מְגִיֵּיר אֶת הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהִיא הַנְּשִׁים, אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ, כְּמוֹ "אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֵת מֹשֶׁה וְאֵת אַהֲרֹן שֶׁגִּדְּלָם וְלִמְדָם .</p>
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Not to be outdone, Abraham's nephew Lot was also known by the rabbis to be a Mitzvah observer. Note how they react to the scene in which Lot receives two guests – probably angels – into his home.



### Genesis 19:3

3. But he urged them strongly, so they turned his way and entered his house. He prepared a feast for them and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.	3. וַיִּפְצְרֵם מְאֹד וַיִּסְרוּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֶּה וּמִצוֹת אֶפֶה וַיֹּאכְלוּ:
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### Rashi to Genesis 19:3

אֶפֶה וּמִצוֹת AND HE BAKED UNLEAVENED BREAD —It was Passover.	ומצות אפה. פסח ה'יה:
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### Rabbeinu Bahya to Genesis 19:3

ומצות אפה ויאכלו, "and he had baked unleavened bread, and they ate." The reason the Torah mentions the kind of bread being served was to contrast it with the fact that Avraham never did serve bread to the angels. Here the Torah wanted to alert us to this. Here the angels did eat the bread as opposed to the meat which disappeared when it was served by Avraham to the angels. The "meal" when the angels were at Avraham's resembled a sacrifice on the altar.	<b>ומצות אפה ויאכלו. מפני שלא הביאו הלחם בסעודת אברהם באר כאן ומצות אפה ויאכלו, כי בכאן אכלו לחם ושם היה הבשר מסתלק ראשון כקרבן הקרב על גבי המזבח.</b>
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Eating food at the home of a gracious host is a subject that has received attention in more than one story found in the book of Breisheet. We are told of the visit of Eliezer to the home of Bethuel, father of Laban and Rebecca. There, Eliezer is invited in to share his mission with the family, and of course it must be an occasion to sit down and 'break bread'. This story is found in Chapter 24 of Genesis, and after a detailed description of how Eliezer finds the most suitable bride for Isaac, he is invited to Rebecca's family's home. We read:



# Genesis 24:31-49

31. "Come in, O blessed of the LORD," he said, "why do you remain outside, when I have made ready the house and a place for the camels?" 32. So the man entered the house, and the camels were unloaded. The camels were given straw and feed, and water was brought to bathe his feet and the feet of the men with him. **33. But when food was set before him, he said, "I will not eat until I have told my tale."** He said, **"Speak, then."** 34. "I am Abraham's servant," he began. 35. "The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become rich: He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and asses. 36. And Sarah, my master's wife, bore my master a son in her old age, and he has assigned to him everything he owns. 37. Now my master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose land I dwell; 38. but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son.' 39. And I said to my master, 'What if the woman does not follow me?' 40. He replied to me, 'The LORD, whose ways I have followed, will send His angel with you and make your errand successful; and you will get a wife for my son from my kindred, from my father's house. 41. Thus only shall you be freed from my adjuration: if, when you come to my kindred, they refuse you—only then shall you be freed from my adjuration.' 42. "I came today to the spring, and I said: O LORD, God of my master Abraham, if You would indeed grant success to the errand on which I am engaged! 43. As I stand by the spring of water, let the young woman who comes out to draw and to whom I say, 'Please, let me drink a little water from your jar,' 44. and who answers, 'You may drink, and I will

לא. וְלֹאמַר בּוֹא בְרוּךְ יְהוָה לָמָּה תַעֲמֹד בַּחוּץ וְאַנְכִּי פָנִיתִי הַבַּיִת וּמִקּוֹם לְגַמְלִים: לב. וַיָּבֹא הָאִישׁ הַבַּיִתָּה וַיַּפְתַּח הַגְּמָלִים וַיִּתֵּן תֶּבֶן וּמִסְפּוֹא לְגַמְלִים וּמִיִּם לְרַחֵץ רַגְלָיו וְרַגְלֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ: לג. וַיֵּשֶׁם [וַיִּוְשֶׁם] לִפְנֵיו לֶאֱכֹל וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶכֹּל עַד אֲסַדְבַּרְתִּי דְבָרִי וַיֹּאמֶר דְּבַר: לד. וַיֹּאמֶר עֲבַד אֲבִרְהָם אֲנִכִּי: לה. וַיְהִיָּה בֶרֶךְ אֶת־אֲדֹנָי מֵאֲד וַיִּגְדַּל וַיִּתְרֹלֹ צֶאֱן וּבָקָר וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב וַעֲבָדִם וּשְׁפָחוֹת וּגְמָלִים וַחֲמֹרִים: לו. וַתֵּלֶד שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲדֹנָי בֶּן לֹאֲדָנִי אַחֲרֵי זִקְנֹתָהּ וַיִּתְּנוּ־לָהּ אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ: לו. וַיִּשְׁבַּעַנִּי אֲדֹנָי לֵאמֹר לֹא־תִקַּח אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי מִבְּנוֹת הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִכִּי יֵשֵׁב בְּאַרְצוֹ: לח. אִם־לֹא אֶל־בִּית־אֲבִי תֵלֶךְ וְאֶל־מִשְׁפַּחְתִּי וְלִקְחָתָּ אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי: לט. וַאֲמַר אֶל־אֲדֹנָי אֵלַי לֹא־תֵלֶךְ הָאִשָּׁה אַחֲרַי: מ. וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי לִפְנָיו יִשְׁלַח מַלְאָכּוֹ אִתּוֹ וְהִצְלִיחַ דִּרְכּוֹ וְלִקְחָתָּ אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי מִמִּשְׁפַּחְתִּי וּמִבֵּית אָבִי: מא. אִזּוֹ תִנָּקֶה מֵאֲלֹתַי כִּי תָבוֹא אֶל־מִשְׁפַּחְתִּי וְאִם־לֹא יִתְּנֶנּוּ לָךְ וְהִיִּיתָ נָקִי מֵאֲלֹתַי: מב. וַאֲבֹא הַיּוֹם אֶל־הָעֵין וַאֲמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אֲבִרְהָם אִם־יִשְׁדָּךְ נָא מִצְּלִיחַ דִּרְכִּי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִכִּי הֵלֶךְ עָלֶיהָ: מג. הִנֵּה אֲנִכִּי נֹצֵב עַל־עֵין הַמַּיִם וְהִנֵּה הַעֲלָמָה הַיְצֵאתָ לְשָׂאֵב וְאִמְרָתִי אֵלֶיהָ הִשְׁקִינִי־נָא מֵעֵט־מַיִם מִכֶּדֶךְ: מד. וַאֲמַרְהָ אֵלַי גַּם־אַתָּה שְׂתֵּה וְגַם לְגַמְלֶיךָ אֲשָׂאֵב הוּא הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־הָכִיחַ יְהוָה לְבוֹן־אֲדֹנָי: מה. אֲנִי טָרִם אֶכְלָה לְדַבֵּר אֶל־לְבִי וְהִנֵּה רַבָּקָה יֹצֵאת וְכֹדֶה עַל־שִׁכְמָהּ וַתֵּרֶד הָעֵינָה וַתִּשָּׂאֵב

<p>also draw for your camels'—let her be the wife whom the LORD has decreed for my master's son.' 45. I had scarcely finished praying in my heart, when Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder, and went down to the spring and drew. And I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.' 46. She quickly lowered her jar and said, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels.' So I drank, and she also watered the camels. 47. I inquired of her, 'Whose daughter are you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him.' And I put the ring on her nose and the bands on her arms. 48. Then I bowed low in homage to the LORD and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who led me on the right way to get the daughter of my master's brother for his son. 49. And now, if you mean to treat my master with true kindness, tell me; and if not, tell me also, that I may turn right or left."</p>	<p>וְאָמַר אֵלֶיהָ הֲשָׁקִינִי נָא: מו. וַתִּמְחֹר וַתּוֹרֵד כְּדָהּ מֵעֶלֶיהָ וַתֹּאמֶר שְׂתָהּ וְגַם גִּמְלִיד אֲשָׁקָה וְאִשְׁתְּ וְגַם הַגְּמָלִים הֲשָׁקֶתָהּ: מז. וְאִשְׁאָל אֹתָהּ וְאָמַר בֵּת מִי אַתְּ וַתֹּאמֶר בֵּת בְּתוּאֵל בֶּן נָחוֹר אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָהּ לּוֹ מִלְכָּה וְאָשָׁם הַנְּזֹם עָלַי אֲפָה וְהַצְמִידִים עַל יָדַיָּהּ: מח. וְאֶקֶד וְאֲשַׁתְּחֶוּהָ לַיהוָה וְאֶבְרָךְ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אֲבִרְהָם אֲשֶׁר הִנְחֵנִי בְּדֶרֶךְ אֲמֶת לְקַחַת אֶת בִּתְאֹחִי אֲדֹנָי לְבָנוֹ: מט. וְעַתָּה אֲסַיְשְׁכֶם עֲשִׂים חֶסֶד וְאֲמֶת אֶת אֲדֹנָי הַגִּידוּ לִי וְאִם לֹא הַגִּידוּ לִי וְאֶפְנֶה עַל יָמִין אוֹ עַל שְׂמָאל:</p>
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To whom is Eliezer speaking? It seems that this address is directed to Laban, Rebecca's brother and not Bethuel, her father. This is supported by a number of verses in the chapter. In verses 29-30 we are informed:

#### Genesis 24:29-30

<p>29. Now Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out to the man at the spring— 30. when he saw the nose-ring and the bands on his sister's arms, and when he heard his sister Rebekah say, "Thus the man spoke to me." He went up to the man, who was still standing beside the camels at the spring.</p>	<p>כט. וּלְרֵבְקָה אָח וּשְׁמוֹ לָבָן וַיֵּרָץ לָבָן אֶל־הָאִישׁ הַחוּצָה אֶל־הָעֵין: ל. וַיְהִי כִּרְאֹת אֶת־הַנְּזֹם וְאֶת־הַצְּמִידִים עַל־יָדַי אַחֲתוֹ וְכִשְׁמְעוֹ אֶת־דְּבָרֵי רֵבְקָה אַחֲתוֹ לֵאמֹר כֹּה־דִבֶּר אֵלַי הָאִישׁ וַיָּבֵא אֶל־הָאִישׁ וְהִנֵּה עֹמֵד עַל־הַגְּמָלִים עַל־הָעֵין:</p>
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Then, following Eliezer's long and detailed speech, we read the following:



## Genesis 24:50-60

<p>50. Then Laban and Bethuel answered, "The matter was decreed by the LORD; we cannot speak to you bad or good. 51. Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master's son, as the LORD has spoken." 52. When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed low to the ground before the LORD. 53. The servant brought out objects of silver and gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; and he gave presents to her brother and her mother. 54. Then he and the men with him ate and drank, and they spent the night. When they arose next morning, he said, "Give me leave to go to my master." 55. But her brother and her mother said, "Let the maiden remain with us some ten days; then you may go." 56. He said to them, "Do not delay me, now that the LORD has made my errand successful. Give me leave that I may go to my master." 57. And they said, "Let us call the girl and ask for her reply." 58. They called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will." 59. So they sent off their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. 60. And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "O sister! May you grow Into thousands of myriads; May your offspring seize The gates of their foes."</p>	<p>נ. וַיֵּעָן לָבָן וּבְתוּאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִיִּהְיֶה יִצְחָק הַדֹּבֵר לֹא נוֹכַל דְּבַר אֱלֹהִים רַע אוֹטוֹב: נא. הִנֵּה רִבְקָה לְפָנֶיךָ קַח וְלֵךְ וְתִהְיֶה אִשָּׁה לְבָרְאֲדָנֶיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה: נב. וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע עֶבֶד אֲבִרְהָם אֶת־ דְּבָרֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרְצָה לַיהוָה: נג. וַיּוֹצֵא הָעֶבֶד כְּלֵי־כֶסֶף וְכֵלֵי זָהָב וּבגָדִים וַיִּתֵּן לְרִבְקָה וּמַגִּדָּתָה נָתַן לְאָחִיהָ וּלְאִמָּהּ: נד. וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ הוּא וְהָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־עִמּוֹ וַיֵּלֶינוּ וַיִּקְוִימוּ בַּבֹּקֶר וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחֲנִי לְאֲדֹנָי: נה. וַיֹּאמֶר אָחִיהָ וְאִמָּהּ תֵּשֶׁב הַנֶּעֱרָ אִתָּנוּ יָמִים אִוְ עָשׂוֹר אַחֵר תֵּלֵךְ: נו. וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֶל־תֹּאחֲרֵי אֹתִי וַיִּהְיֶה הַצֶּלֶחַ דַּרְכִּי שְׁלָחוֹנִי וְאֵלֶכָה לְאֲדֹנָי: נז. וַיֹּאמְרוּ נִקְרָא לַנֶּעֱרָ וְנִשְׁאַלָה אֶת־פִּיהָ: נח. וַיִּקְרָאוּ לְרִבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֶיהָ הַתֵּלְכִי עִם־הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה וְתֵאמָר אֵלָיו: נט. וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ אֶת־רִבְקָה אֶחָתָם וְאֶת־ מִנְקִתָּהּ וְאֶת־עֶבֶד אֲבִרְהָם וְאֶת־אֲנָשָׁיו: ס. וַיִּבְרְכוּ אֶת־רִבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהּ אֲחִיתָנוּ אֵת הַיּוֹ לְאֵלֶיךָ רִבְקָה וַיִּירָשׁ זָרְעֶךָ אֶת שַׁעַר שָׁנְאָיו:</p>
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The question that arises when this section is examined is, 'What happened to Bethuel?' Grammatically, verse 50 intimates that Laban (and not Bethuel) was active in the negotiations surrounding the 'shidduch', even though Bethuel is mentioned in the verse. The question of the whereabouts of the father is substantiated by verses 53 and 55 which refer to 'her brother and her mother', leaving out the father altogether.



What is the 'pshat' and what might be offered as 'drash' regarding Bethuel? Of course, it is only proper that we give Rashi an opportunity to respond first, since he is the master of using 'drash' in hopes of explaining the 'pshat'.

### Rashi to Genesis 24:50

ויען לבן ובתואל THEN LABAN AND BETHUEL ANSWERED —He (Laban) was a wicked person and so rushed in to answer before his father.	ויען לבן ובתואל .רָשָׁע הָיָה, וְקָפָץ לְהַשִּׁיב לִפְנֵי אָבִיו :
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Is this 'pshat'? How about the suggestion made by the Radak? Is this 'pshat'?

### Radak to Genesis 24:50

ויען לבן ובתואל, Lavan spoke before his father seeing that Betuel was an old man and the affairs of the family were already being conducted by his son Lavan.	ויען לבן ובתואל, הקדים לבן לבתואל כי בתואל היה זקן ודברי הבית מוטלים על לבן.
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### Rashi to Genesis 24:55

AND HER BROTHER AND HER MOTHER SAID —But where was Bethuel? He wished to prevent the marriage therefore an angel came and killed him ( <a href="#">Genesis Rabbah 60:12</a> ).	ויאמר אחיה ואמה .ובתואל היכן היתה? היתה רוצה לעכב ובא מלאך והמיתו :
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### Radak to Genesis 24:53

לאחיה ולאמה, for they were the mainstay of the household, Betuel being old and frail. According to an aggadic interpretation based on Lavan speaking instead of his father, he had died suddenly as he intended to raise obstacles to the marriage.	לאחיה ולאמה, כי הם היו עקר הבית כי בתואל זקן היה. ובדרש כי היה בלבו לעכב ובא המלאך והמיתו :
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So the text wishes to communicate to its reader that Bethuel was no longer alive during Eliezer's visit, even though he was present for the initial conversation (as seen in Gen. 24:50). How did he die? Please note that Radak (to verse 50) mentions that Bethuel was an old man, so perhaps he died of old age. The Midrash suggests something else:

**Midrash Aggadah (France c.1020 - c.1220 CE) to Genesis 24:53**

Her brother and her mother. Where was Bethuel? It was said that the same angel (Gen. 24:7) which Abraham sent with Eliezer to guide him switched the bowls of food (Bethuel had poisoned the one that was to go to Eliezer) and Bethuel ate from it and died. Others say that the angel killed him because Bethuel, who was a general who would have relations with all of the virgins just before they were to get married, was to have relations with Rivka. [Were he not to do so, the townspeople would kill him.] The angel kept him from doing so by killing him right then.	אחיה ואמה. והיכן היה בתואל, אמרו עליו שאותו המלאך שאמר אברהם לאליעזר הוא ישלח מלאכו, החליף הקערה שהיה בה סם המות לפני אליעזר ונתנה לפני בתואל ואכלה ומת. ויש אומרים שמלאך נגפו, לפי שכל בתולה שהיתה נישאת באותו מקום, היה בתואל שוכב עמה תחלה, וכדי שלא ישכב עם בתו, בא המלאך ונגפו. ד"א שאמרו אנשי מקומו עכשיו נראה מה יעשה בביתו, אם שוכב עם בתו כשאר הבנות כאשר שוכב עם בנותינו מוטב, ואם לאו נהרוג אותו וכל אשר לו נגפו המלאך על זה באותו לילה:
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There are 9 references to Bethuel in the entire Tanach, all in the book of Genesis. The only place where Bethuel is reported to have said anything is in verse 50 of chapter 24. There are 54 references to Laban, all in the book of Genesis. What do you think?