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Lech Lecha: Parshah and Haftara
by Julie Zhuk on 2022-11-05

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Parshah Bereishis 12:1-17:27

G-d speaks to Abraham and tells him to leave his land. He is to go forth from his birthplace, where his father was born. Abraham is to go travel to the land that G-d will instruct him to go to. That area is the land of Canaan. G-d has big plans for Abraham, for he will become a great nation. G-d tells Abraham that his wife Sarai will be joined by his nephew Lot. They will make their way to the land of Canaan and there Abraham builds an altar. He spreads the message all around that there is only One G-d. There is a famine and it forces the first Jew to leave for Egypt. It is in Egypt where Abraham's beautiful wife Sarai is taken to Pharaoh's place, the king wanted to marry her. Abraham is able to escape being killed by the king as he and Sarai pretend to be brother and sister.

A plague happens in Egypt, G-d caused this to happen so that the king wouldn't be able to touch Sarai. The plague convinces Pharaoh to return Sarai to Avraham. To compensate that Abraham was covering up he was truly Sarai's husband and not just brother, he gave Pharaoh gold, silver, and cattle. When Abraham leaves Egypt he goes back to the land of Canaan. It is there that he gets separated from Lot.

Lot settles in the evil city of Sdom and he falls captive there and the mighty armies of Chedorlaomer and his three allies take over the five cities of Sdom Alley. Abraham tries to come and rescue his nephew, he manages to defeat the four kings and is blessed by Malki-Zedek. He is the king of Jerusalem. It's in this Parsha that we learn one of the most important lessons when G-d seals the Covenant of Parts.

This means G-d told Abraham about the destiny of what would happen to his descendants. They would be strangers in a land where they would be enslaved and oppressed by other groups of people. There was one last thing G-d wanted Abraham to know and for him to tell the future generation of Jews. To have no fear, in the end, G-d would redeem the Jewish people. The Jews would inherit the land of Canaan, which would become the land of Israel.

The first half of this promise from G-d came true when the Jews were subjugated in the land of Egypt. The second half of the promise G-d gave them was mostly fulfilled when the prophet Joshua, took over and settled most of the land that had been promised to Abraham. The Jewish people were later sent into exile, but getting the land of Israel has been promised to us as an eternal heritage. To this day, Jews hope and pray for that promise to be fulfilled for that promise to come true in its entirety. This should happen when we return to the land with its extended borders as had once been promised to Abraham with the coming of Mashiach, speedily in our days.

The Covenant with Abraham came together because in the land of Canaan there was a war being waged between two mighty groups of kings.

One of these groups had five kings, the other king had four kings. The second group was very powerful and overcame the first group of kings, while they were fighting in the war they managed to capture Lot as well. Abraham did hear the news and he set out right away to go fight the four kings, he was vastly outnumbered. Still, he had a lot of success, He managed to rescue his nephew Lot, and some of the other people who were taken captive. Abraham was able to return these people's possessions to them. Afterwards Abraham was a bit concerned about the miracles he had witnessed performed by G-d.

G-d knew Abraham was worried and he told him to have no fear, His Promise to the Jewish people remained. G-d wanted Abraham to repopulate the earth. He told Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. G-d also predicted for Abraham that a son would be born to him soon. G-d assured Abraham that his descendants would receive the land of Canaan. It was hard for Abraham to believe these promises, so he asked G-d to give him some kind of a sign. He asked G-d, "How will I know I will inherit the land"?

Back to the Covenant between the parts, there is a Hebrew term for establishing a treaty between two parties. This is known as "kirtat-brit." This literally means dividing a covenant, this term might seem like an oxymoron. The reason for that is the promise is to bring unity and not any kind of division. The phrase had its roots in an ancient custom, parties entering a covenant would divide an animal and pass between its parts to seal the deal. The verse that is brought up about this context is, Abraham took for himself all three heifers, three goats, three rams, a turtledove, and a young bird. Abraham divided them in the middle and he placed each part opposite of its mate.

He didn't divide the birds, it came to pass and the sun had set. It was dark and there was a smoking furnace and a firebrand that passed between these parts. This was the day that G-d formed a covenant with Abraham, G-d said to your seed I have given this land.

The Torah was written by an infinite G-d. It is written in such a way that it is open to many interpretations. There are commentaries that are both literal and mystical. They explain the meaning behind "Brit Bein HaBetarim." The Torah asks us why G-d commanded Abraham to take these kinds of animals. There are some explanations from commentaries saying they are symbolic references to the animals. They will be brought as sacrifices to G-d in the Holy Temple.

There is also the explanation that these animals represent Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham had once served his guests calf, Isaac was almost sacrificed himself upon an altar. Instead, he got exchanged for a ram. Then finally Jacob wore goats' hair to disguise himself and it was how he got blessings from Isaac. These animals also represent the exiles of the Jews in Babylonia, Persia, and when they were in Greece. Commentaries say that when Abraham took a turtledove and a young bird, these types are fed upon predators.

This is to say the Jewish nation would be trampled on and they would be beaten by the nations of the world throughout their exile. Later in the verse, it says when Abraham divided the animals in half, he left the birds whole. By doing this it shows that no matter how hard life was for the Jewish people, they would always remain united until the end of the days. It is later in the verse it says that the birds of prey came down upon carcasses. Abraham managed to drive them away. There are opinions that explain what this means too, the birds of prey symbolize the nations of the world. They wish to uproot and destroy the Jewish people, we remember how Abraham chased the birds away.

So these nations will never be successful in driving the Jewish people away. Other commentaries explain the symbolism to be the opposite, they say the birds of prey represent King David. He was able to swoop down and defeat all the enemies of the Jewish people. Abraham chasing away the birds explains that getting rid of the enemies of the Jews won't be easy. It won't be fully accomplished until the Mashiach comes.

G-d didn't just give the Covenant to Abraham, He explained the message for it. This message is the Jews will face really hard times, but at the end of it all the Jews will remain strong. The Covenant is G-d's promise to the Jewish people, that they will inherit the entire land of Israel. Jews will forever keep saying until the Mashiach comes, "Let us pray that this be fulfilled with the coming of the Mashiach and for it to happen soon. Abraham and Sarai live in the land of Canaan for ten years and never had a child together. This is when Sarai tells Abraham to marry her maidservant, Hagar. Hagar is able to have a baby and she grows to be mean to Sarai.

For this, Sarai treats her harshly and Hagar runs away. There is an angel that convinces Hagar to return, he tells her that her son will father a very populated nation. The baby boy that Hagar has is named Ishmael. This happens when Abram is eighty-six years old. Thirteen years go by and G-d changes Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai to Sara. That name means "Princess." G-d promises the two of them that a son will be born to them as well. G-d tells them that the child will be a boy and they should name him "Isaac." G-d tells them that they need to give him a Bris Mila.

The name Isaac means to laugh and Sara did laugh at the idea of her being pregnant. G-d tells Abraham and Sara that from this child Isaac, would stem a great nation and that He was going to establish a Special Bond. Abraham was also commanded to give himself a Bris Mila. The other men in the community were to do the same, this was a sign of the covenant between the Jews and G-d. Abraham did what G-d had asked of Him, he also made sure any other man in his household had done the same.

Haftara for Lech Lecha

Isaiah 40-27-41:16

The Haftara this week discusses Abraham's journey into the land of Canaan. G-d helps Abraham win a miraculous battle against some kings. Isaiah addresses the Jewish people's complaint. They feel when they've served G-d, they have been ignored. The Jewish people claimed to Isaiah that they were not rewarded by G-d. This is when Isaiah reminds the Jewish

people of G-d's greatness, he tells the Jews the time will come when G-d will give those who are not strong their strength.

G-d states that youths should become tired and weary and that young men should stumble, but anyone who puts their hope in G-d will have a different experience. G-d will renew their vigor and they shall rise with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not grow tired.

The Haftara covers how no one can comprehend the wisdom that G-d has. We may not feel that G-d is granting us a reward, but we can't understand the reason for Him delaying the reward to those who are being righteous. This is the part in the Haftara where it focuses on idolatrous nations.

Isaiah reminds them of Abraham's greatness, how he arrived in the land of Canaan and pursued and then defeated the four kings. The islands saw and feared and the ends of the earth quaked. The nations witnessed many miracles G-d performed, yet they didn't abandon their ways of believing in idol worship. The idol craftsmen only strengthened their "smith." He was the one who smoothed the idol with the hammer. The one with the hammer strengthened the one with the person who wielded the sledgehammer. The one who glues the coating part says the words, "It is good." He strengthened it with nails saying it shouldn't move.

To the Jews who didn't practice idolatry, G-d promised them a reward for their loyalty. G-d reminded the Jewish people to not fear, for He is with us now and forever. He told the Jews to not be discouraged for He is our G-d. He reminded us that anyone who will turn against the Jews or already has done so will be ashamed. They will be confounded and those who try to fight with the Jewish people will become lost.