

פרשת
לך לך
Parashat Lech Lecha

*Bereshit / Genesis 12:1-17:27, Isaiah 40:27-41:16
John 1:1-18*

Being a Man of Faith

In the Midrashic literature, the rabbis teach about the pivotal significance of God's reign. The Kingdom of Heaven signifies God's redemptive power. His rule over our lives encompasses the authority of the Torah. By the time the people of Israel had arrived at Sinai and received the Ten Commandments, they had already experienced the divine deliverance of God and His protection. Take for example what the rabbis say according to the *Mekilta de-Rabbi Yishmael 20:2*.

Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael 20:2

”אנכי ה' אלהיך” – מפני מה לא נאמרו עשרת הדברות בתחלת התורה? משלו משל, למה הדבר דומה? לאחד שנכנס במדינה. אמר להם: אמלוך עליכם! אמרו לו כלום עשית לנו, שתמלוך עלינו? מה עשה? בנה להם את החומה, הכניס להם את המים, עשה להם מלחמות. אמר להם: אמלוך עליכם! אמרו לו: הן והן. כך המקום הוציא ישראל ממצרים, קרע להם הים, הוריד להם המן, העלה להם הבאר, הגיז להם השלום, עשה להם מלחמת עמלק. אמר להם: אמלוך עליכם! אמרו לו הן והן. רבי

אומר: להודיע שבחן של ישראל, שכשעמדו כולן על הר סיני לקבל התורה – השוו כלם לב אחד לקבל מלכות שמים בשמחה. ולא עוד, אלא שממשכנין זה על זה. ולא על הנגלות בלבד נגלה הקב"ה עליהם, לכרות ברית עמהם – אלא אף על הסתרים, שנאמר (דברים כט כח): "הנסתרות לה' אלהינו, והנגלות לנו ולבנינו עד עולם". אמרו לו: על הגלויים אנו כורתים ברית עמך, ולא על הסתרים, שלא יהא אחד ממנו חוטא בסתר – ויהא הצבור מתמשכן:

(Yithro 20:2) "I am the L-rd your G-d": Why were the ten commandments not stated at the beginning of the Torah? An analogy: A man enters a province and says (to the inhabitants): I will rule over you. They respond: Did you do anything for us that you would rule over us? Whereupon he builds the (city) wall for them, provides water for them, wages war for them, and then says: I will rule over you — whereupon they respond: Yes! Yes! Thus, the L-rd took Israel out of Egypt, split the sea for them, brought down manna for them, raised the well for them, brought in quail for them, waged war with Amalek for them, and then said to them: I will rule over you — whereupon they responded: Yes! Yes! Rebbi says: (The thrust of "your [singular] G-d") is to apprise us of the eminence of Israel, that when they all stood at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, they were all of one heart, to receive the kingdom of Heaven with joy. And, what is more, they all stood security for each other (for observance of the mitzvot.) And not only over what was revealed alone did the Holy One Blessed be He appear to them (in Arvoth Moav, viz. Devarim 29:9) to forge a covenant with them, but even over what was concealed, as it is written (Devarim 29:28) "What is hidden (is known to) the L-rd our G-d, and what is revealed is for us and for our children forever" — this, by way of saying: Over what is revealed

we will enter into a covenant with you, but not over what is concealed, so that one not sin in secret and the congregation be bound thereby.

What we find here is a community of people seeking to do the will of God by receiving the kingdom of Heaven with joy at the foot of the mountain of Sinai. God's mercy drew them to His presence and place of worship, and allowed them to enter into a covenant relationship by faith. The New Testament teachings about the nature of God are firmly rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures and by what we find here in the parallel rabbinic thought. The Jewish background of early Christianity provides for us a rich perception of the significance of God being One in faith and practice (the application of God's Word). This is how Abraham lived his life. He taught others about God in heaven and added to his number those who would believe in the One true God. We read that God said Abraham was accounted righteous because of his faith and faithfulness to God's command in his willingness to teach others (i.e. his children) and to speak of God's mercy to those around him. (*Bereshit / Genesis 15:6 And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith. NASB*)

In the beginning of Parashat Lech Lecha, the Lord God who is One, calls to Abram to go to a new land and He promised Abram that he would become a great nation, and many children would be born unto him. These promises begin with the opening verses of this week's Torah Portion in *Bereshit / Genesis 12:1-8*.

Bereshit / Genesis 12:1-8

12:1 Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; 12:2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 12:3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.' 12:4 So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he

departed from Haran. 12:5 Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan. 12:6 Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite was then in the land. 12:7 The Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.' So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. 12:8 Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. 12:9 Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev. (NASB)

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם לֵךְ-לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּדָרְוֹ וּמִמּוֹלְדֹתֶיךָ
וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ: ב וְאָעֲשֶׂיךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל
וְאַבְרָכָךָ וְאֶגְדְּלֶךָ וְשִׁמְךָ וְהָיָה בְרָכָה: ג וְאַבְרָכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ
וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אָאֵר וְנִבְרָכוּ בְךָ כָּל מְשֻׁפָּחֹת הָאֲדָמָה: ד וַיֵּלֶךְ
אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו יְהוָה וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בֶּן-
חֲמִשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בָּצֵאתוֹ מִחָרָן: ה וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם
אֶת-שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת-לוֹט בֶּן-אָחִיו וְאֶת-כָּל-רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר
רָכְשׁוּ וְאֶת-הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר-עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן וַיֵּצְאוּ לְלֶכֶת אֶרֶץ
כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: ו וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם
שָׁכֵם עַד אֵלּוֹן מוֹרֶה וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי אָז בְּאֶרֶץ: ז וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה
אֶל-אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר לְזָרְעֶךָ אֲתָן אֶת-הָאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת וַיְכֹן שָׁם
מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה הַנִּרְאָה אֵלָיו: ח וַיַּעֲתֶק מִשָּׁם הַהֵרָה מִקְדָּם
לְבֵית-אֵל וַיֵּט אֹהֶלָה בֵּית-אֵל מִיָּם וְהָעֵי מִקְדָּם וַיְכֹן-שָׁם
מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה: ט וַיִּסַּע אַבְרָם הַלּוֹךְ
וְנִסּוּעַ הַנֶּגֶבָה:

When the Lord God Almighty began working with Abram, God gave him a command and an amazing promise. The command was *“Get*

out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you" (Bereshit / Genesis 12:1). The Lord explained that his obedience would cause the Lord to make him into a great nation, to bless his name amongst the nations, and to curse those who curse you and bless those who bless you, and that all of the families of the earth would be blessed (*Bereshit / Genesis 12:2-3*). This promise of God had multiple components, including the promise of many descendants, fame, divine protection, and through his descendants he would be a blessing to all people. Abram's children and grand children would also reap the same benefits and inheritance (see *Hebrews 11:9*). This multi-component blessing causes us to refer to the blessings as promises. This is how Paul understood these things according to Galatians saying, "*Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made" (Galatians 3:16)*. These things describe how the people from all nations will be blessed, and are able to receive salvation (*Acts 4:10-12, Galatians 3:16*) by the coming of the Messiah.

The Rabbis go on to say the following concerning the opening verses of the Torah portion and Abram being a blessing to the nations.

Chizkuni, Genesis 12:2 Part 3

והיה ברכה, "*as a result you will become a source of blessing.*" We find a parallel to this expression in *Isaiah 19,24*: ביום ההוא אשים את ישראל ברכה בקרב הארץ, "*on that day I will set up Israel as a blessing in the midst of the earth.*"

According to Chizkuni, the blessing to Abraham is connected to Israel being a blessing in the midst of the earth referencing *Isaiah 19:24*. Part of God's Plan for our lives is for us to live for the glory of God. The promises that God gives to Abram was that He was going to bless him and through him then all of the world. Paul wrote saying, "*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28)*. The ultimate blessing is for the purpose of manifesting the glory of God in our lives.

Rambam states the following:

Ramban on Genesis 12:2 Part 1

And you shall be a blessing: You will be a blessing in that they will be blessed through you by saying, "God should make you like Avraham." And He also added that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him, and not just the people of his land. Or "and they shall bless themselves by you" [means] that they would be blessed on his account. And behold, this section did not elucidate the whole topic. As what is the reason that the Holy One, blessed be He, should say to him, "Leave your land and I will do good to you, like there had never been [before]," without prefacing that Avraham was a servant of God or perfectly righteous - or that He say a reason for his leaving the land, such that there would be in his going to another land, a coming close to God. And the custom of Scripture is to say, "Walk in front of Me and listen to My voice and I will do good to you," as with David and Shlomo; and like the matter in all of the Torah: "If you will walk in my statutes" (Leviticus 26:3); "if you will truly listen to the voice of the Lord, your God" (Deuteronomy 28:1); and with Yitzchak, it stated, "on account of Avraham, my servant" (Genesis 26:24). But to promise him [blessing] because of his leaving the land is not a reason. Rather, the reason is because the people of Ur Kasdim did bad things to him due to his faith in the Holy One, blessed be He; and [so] he fled to the land of Canaan, but delayed in Charan - [such] that He told him to leave [Charan] as well, and to do what he thought [to do] at first. This is so that he serve Him and call the people to the name of God in the chosen land. And there his name would grow and all of the nations there would be blessed - not like what they did to him in Ur Kadim, where they would scorn and curse him, and they put him in a pit or into a fiery furnace. And [so] He said to him that He would bless those that bless him; and if an individual would curse him, [the latter]

would be cursed. And this is the reason of this section, but the Torah does not want to write at length about the opinions of idolaters and to explain the issue that was between him and the Chaldeans regarding faith; just like it was brief about the matter of the generation of Enosh, and their rationale for the idolatry that they developed.

Rambam comments that the Lord God commanded Abram to leave his country and to bless him without first requiring him to be a servant of God or to be perfectly righteous. The commentary answers saying, *“And the custom of Scripture is to say, “Walk in front of Me and listen to My voice and I will do good to you,” as with David and Shlomo; and like the matter in all of the Torah: “If you will walk in my statutes” (Leviticus 26:3); “if you will truly listen to the voice of the Lord, your God” (Deuteronomy 28:1); and with Yitzchak, it stated, “on account of Avraham, my servant” (Genesis 26:24)”* The idea that is being put forward here is when we walk in God’s presence (walking before Him) walking by His commandments, we are walking by His light and it is impossible not to see the dangers in our lives. When determining our hearts to walk in God’s ways, it is impossible not to see our own mistakes. For example, it is impossible to walk with God and also be a liar, sinful, corrupt, adulterous, malicious, scheming, performing lashon hara (gossip), etc. Having the Spirit of God dwelling in our midst (in our hearts) it is impossible to walk with Him and practice unrighteousness. (read *1 John 3*) In *Bereshit / Genesis 17*, the Lord God told Abram *“I am God Almighty: walk before Me, and be thou perfect.”* At this point, the command came only to Abram. Later we read that Moshe gave this command to all of the people of Israel. Yeshua the Messiah then brought this command to all of the world, to those who would believe in Him and obey the Gospel. Again, this is how Paul understood the Gospel and why he wrote what he did in *Romans 16:25* *Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 16:26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come*

to the obedience that comes from faith 16:27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen. (NASB) Paul speaks of the gentiles coming to the obedience that comes from faith. This is what Yeshua taught us about the Torah, and this is what Abraham did having a life that was consistent with what he believed. Abram had faith, and having faith he answered God's call on his life to go and to do what God wanted him to do.

A Jewish leader who lived not long after Yeshua, his name was Joshua ben Korach, he asked the question, "*Why does the first section, 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One' (Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:4) Precede the second section, 'And if you will obey my commandments which I command you this day to love the Lord your God ...' Devarim / Deuteronomy 11:13)?*" The question is asking why the Scriptures are organized in the way that they are in the sense that they form a liturgical prayer that is recited twice daily. Joshua ben Korach answered saying, that the reason is for "*the kingdom of heaven.*" This answer is related to a man's response, that first he is to take upon himself the kingdom of heaven, and afterwards he is to take upon himself the yoke of the commandments. This illustrates what God has done, He reached out to all peoples by His mighty acts of salvation, and has provided a way of life for the subjects of his kingdom. This is the point of the Lord God calling Abram from the midst of his family, his dad being one who manufactured idols, calling Abram to leave and go to another land, another place, another way of life. (*Note the motif of faith and repentance here.*) The reign of God in a person's life is realized when the power of God is manifest in one being willing to obey His word. Obedience to God's way of life is the response of the Lord almighty living in us. The acceptance of the kingdom of heaven means to acknowledge that God is One, He is unique, and that we are to bear witness that there are no other gods. This is the power of God's reign as illustrated in the example from the *Mekilta de-Rabbi Yishmael 20:2*. The Lord God Almighty did all of these things, even sending His Son Yeshua to die for our sins providing a way to draw near to Him and to enter into His kingdom.

Receiving the kingdom of heaven signifies acknowledging God's presence in every aspect of human existence and working alongside God in His effort to help people in need. The spiritual leaders of an-

cient Judaism sought to obey God's will as they acknowledged His divine lordship in every aspect of their daily lives. In a similar manner, Yeshua the Messiah focused upon God's kingdom and reign as a way of life. This is why Yeshua referred to Abraham so often in his teachings. (see *John 8*) In the Apostolic Writings, we read about Paul who taught the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ openly and unhindered. (*Acts 28:31*) Looking at what and how Paul taught in his epistles, we can see how he instructed everyone about the kingdom of heaven, how we are to accept the Lord into our lives, and of the power of God that is found in suffering for the Lord while maintaining our faith in Yeshua God's plan of redemption. Paul upheld the moral and ethical standard in the communities he established. His ethics were based upon his training as a Pharisee and his love for the Torah. This is how the Torah and the Gospel message are connected being found in the need for each person to experience God's power as it is demonstrated in the divine sovereignty over our lives. (*i.e. we have a God given desire that God's Word would govern our lives.*) The kingdom of heaven is here in full force just as God and His power was present and in full force in the midst of the people in the Torah. As people seek to enter into the kingdom of heaven by faith in His Messiah, they seek His reign over their lives, to obey His will, and for the move and power of God to overcome sin. All of these things are coupled to the concept of God's sovereignty over our lives, and this comes by our making the conscious decision to ask Him into our hearts to be Lord over our lives. Entry to His kingdom comes by way of the Messiah, to believe in Him and in what He did for us, and to walk in His ways just as He walked in the ways of God's Torah and all those who went before him. These are the things we are being taught as we read the story and life of Abram, the man of faith.