10-28-23 To Roeh Israel Abilene– Lech L'Cha (go forth, yourself)
Torah Portion; Genesis 12:1-17:27
Haftarah: Isa 40:27-41:16
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Hebrews 7:1-17

Walk in Faith and Not by Sight

Central question of this message: Do you have faith to believe in G-d's desire for your best, even when you can't see how things are getting better for you as you follow Him?

This parashah takes its name from the command given by G-d to Avram in the city of Haran, as recorded in Genesis chapter 12. Its name comes from the 7th word in the English and the 5th and 6th words in the original Hebrew.

Gen 12:1-3

> Now the LORD said to Avram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

12:1 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־ אַבְרָם לֶךְ־ לְךָ
Now had said the Lord unto Abram, Get thee
559 3068 413 87 3212 3807a

מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ
out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from house, thy father's
776 4138 1004 1

אֶל־ הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ׃
unto a land that I will shew thee:
413 776 834 7200

2 וְאֶעֶשְׂךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וַאֲבָרֶכְךָ
And I will make of thee a nation, great and I will bless thee,
6213 1471 1419 1288

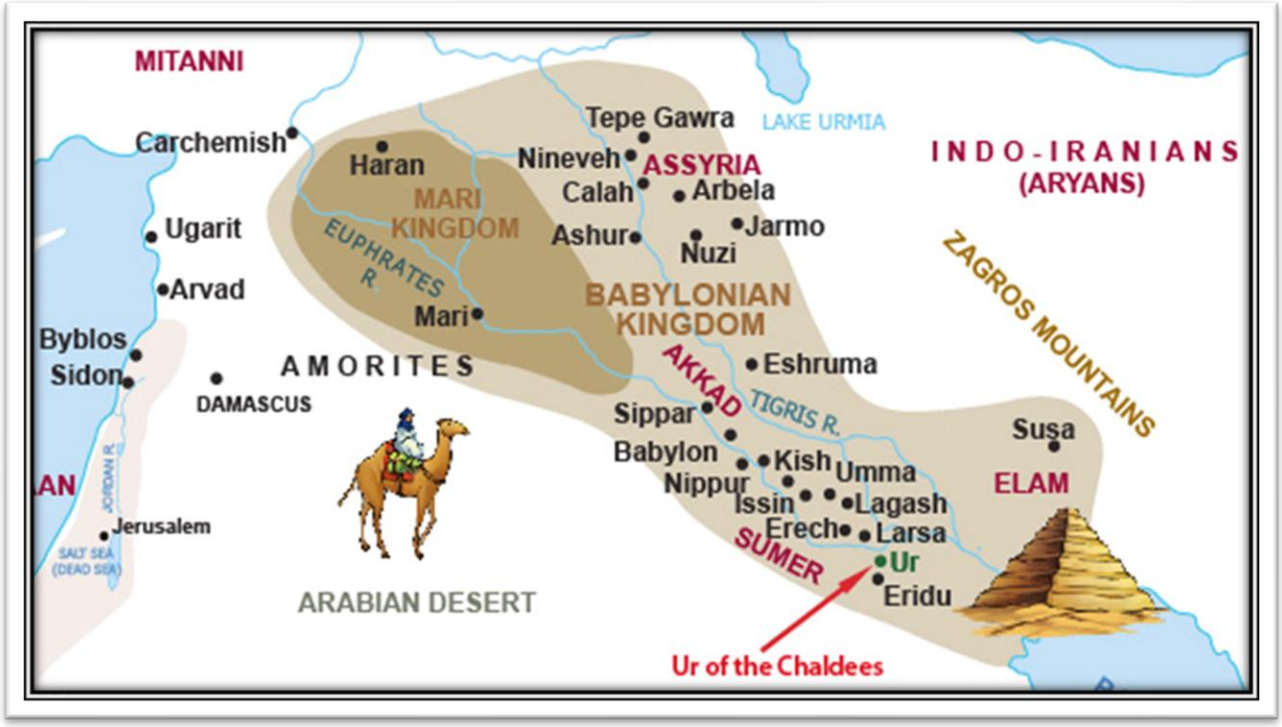
וַאֲגַדְּלָה שְׁמֶךָ וְהְיֵה בְּרָכָה׃
and make great; thy name and thou shalt be a blessing:
1431 8034 1961 1293

3 וַאֲבָרֲכָה מְבָרֲכֶיךָ וּמְקַלֶּלְךָ
And I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee:
1288 1288 7043

אָאֹר וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ כֹּל מִשְׁפְּחֹת הָאֲדָמָה׃
curse and shall be blessed. in thee all families of the earth
779 1288 871a 3605 4940 127

In the previous parasha, we find that Terah (Abraham's father), and the entire family were living in the land of the Chaldeans. Although Ur is today many miles inland, at some ancient time, it was a coastal city, at the

mouth of the Euphrates on the Persian Gulf. What we see today is the result of massive erosion of the topsoil and its deposition into the sea, due to poor land management by people who are poor stewards of the land.



Ancient historians tell us that the "Kasdim" - the people of this area also called the "Chaldeans"– taught Terah and his sons idolatry. Terah, they report, then took his son Avram, Sarai and Lot and set out to go to Canaan. But they fell short of making the entire trip. They went as far as Haran, and settled there.

That historical account is consistent with the final passage in last week's parasha:

Gen 11:31-32

> And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Avram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there.

So, it is clear that the call by G-d to leave Ur came first to Terah. Terah, as the patriarch of the family would have led the family in the journey.

As you can see from the map, Haran is a fair distance from Ur, but still on the same side of the Euphrates River. Not only did Terah fail to take his family to Canaan, he didn't even cross the Euphrates.

It is understandable that Terah would not wish to make a straight-line trip to Canaan, since that would require crossing a wide desert. But once in Haran, Terah could have turned southwest on the well-established trade route to Canaan and finished the journey.

Why did Terah only go to Haran, and not then take the road that ran westward from there to Canaan? We don't know. But we do know that after the death of Terah in Haran, G-d urged Avram to *continue the*

journey – to the same location – and when Avram got there, G-d's plan for the Jewish people was once again moving forward.

Let's pause now to stop merely reading Scripture and try to live it a bit, to see more of what is there. Avram was taken to Haran, a long way from where he grew up, and there his father established a home. This place was an attractive one. It had abundant water, a cooler and wetter climate which was conducive to abundant crops and grazing. It was at the conjunction of major trade routes, which made it a more wealthy place because of increased trade. It was at the apex of the fertile crescent in that part of the world.



The family lived there many years, it seems. Terah died there. Avram and his family had roots in this place. Why would anyone wish to leave that place to go to another place which could have been far less hospitable?

Then came G-d's call to Avram. Avram was not only commanded to go to the place that G-d would show him as the Promised Land, but Avram was also commanded to remove himself from the deep pagan influences of the Chaldean society, and particularly the idolatry of the city of Ur.

Avram was called to leave the best place he had ever lived, with a wonderful family, and a wonderful future. It was a place of comfort and promise. It was a place where he and his family could build a future.

But he was instructed to go somewhere else. You can see that he was going to have to reject what he knew best and embrace a place that he had never seen.

What was the promise that Avram received from G-d for taking this leap of faith?

Gen 12:1-3

> "Go forth from your country,
> And from your relatives
> And from your father's house,
> To the land which I will show you;
> 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;
> 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 shall be blessed."

But when Avram got to where he was instructed to go, did he find a place better than Haran? Clearly not.

Gen 12:6-13

> 6 And 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. 7 And 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. 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. 9 And Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev.

10 Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. 11 And it came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; 12 and it will come about when the Egyptians see you, that they will say,' This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live.

Can you see that maybe Avram was thinking, “Did I hear G-d correctly?” Or maybe “This seems to be going from bad to worse…” Where is all the blessing part that G-d had been talking about?

Later on in the passage we find that Avram did pass-off Sarai as his sister, and she was taken into the harem of Pharaoh. Then there were plagues because of that, and Pharaoh kicked Avram and his family out of Egypt.

And there was still a famine, and now Avram was stuck in the Negev – one of the most desolate and arid places in that area.

Yes, it seems – bad to worse, then to worse yet. So, can you now hear Avram crying out in his heart, "Well G-d, what's next? Were there not enough graves in Egypt that you sent me into this desert to die here with my family?"

The scarcity of food and grazing for the combined herds of Avram and Lot started to really have an impact on the family. The servants of Avram tended flocks as did the servants of Lot. Once Avram and Lot started to see a little bit of abundance in the Jordon valley there was even greater strife.

Then Avram gave Lot the choice. "You go here and I will go there, or you go there, and I will go here." Of course, Lot chose the lush valley, leaving the dusty hill country covered in scrub brush to Avram.

And after that, G-d once again spoke to Avram.

Gen 13:14-18

> 14 And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; 15 for all the land which you see, **I will give it** to you and to your descendants forever. 16 And **I will make** your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. 17 Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for **I will give it** to you." 18 Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

Do you notice the future tense in all these promises? To say "I give" in the present tense, it would be *ani notenet,* not *etnenah,* as in this passage, signifying a time in the future.

Remember that Lot got the best grazing now, not in the future. And Avram was only promised some large tract of land for his descendants at some point in the future, but not today? How is this very satisfying to Avram?

But then it gets worse.

There is a war in the valley, and Lot and all his household and his belongings are carried off as plunder by Chedorlaomer and the four kings who were aligned with him in the battle.

So, Avram formed his own army of 318 men and went after them. After a night attack, Avram's forces won and they not only rescued Lot and his household, but chased the Chedorlaomer army as far north as beyond Damascus.

So, were things now more restful and prosperous for Avram and his family than what they had in Haran? It doesn't seem so. So far Avram has no good grazing or farmland for his flocks and people. He has no land to call his own yet. He has been traveling in tents with no rest. He even had to fight a war that he didn't start, just to save a relative. Where is the upside in this calling so far?

At this point, as Avram is leading his army back to his campsite at Mamre, he passes a place called Salem, and he is met by a mystical person.

Gen 14:17-24

> 17 Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to

meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).
18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and
wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. 19 And he
blessed him and said,

"Blessed be Abram of God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth;
20 And blessed be God Most High,
Who has delivered your enemies into your hand."

And he gave him a tenth of all. 21 And the king of Sodom
said to Abram, "Give the people to me and take the goods for
yourself." 22 And Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have
sworn to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and
earth, 23 that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or
anything that is yours, lest you should say,' I have made
Abram rich.' 24 "I will take nothing except what the young
men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me,
Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share."

Our Sages have, I believe, missed the greatest import of this passage. They postulate that this Melchizedek was actually Shem (son of Noah), and because he blessed Avram before blessing G-d, he forfeited his right

to the priesthood forever, and thus all future priests would arise from the lineage of Avram.[1]

I don't believe their analysis is essentially correct, and I favor the analysis of the author of the book entitled "Hebrews" which has much to say of this mysterious king-priest.

The author uses as a springboard the psalm which declares much of this person, and we should start there, as well.

Ps 110

> 110 The Lord says to my Lord:
> "Sit at My right hand,
> Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet."
> 2 The Lord will stretch forth Thy strong scepter from Zion, saying,
> "Rule in the midst of Thine enemies."
> 3 Thy people will volunteer freely in the day of Thy power;
> In holy array, from the womb of the dawn,
> Thy youth are to Thee as the dew.
>
> 4 The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind,

[1] Nedarim 32b:7

"Thou art a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek."
5 The Lord is at Thy right hand;
He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath.
6 He will judge among the nations,
He will fill them with corpses,
He will shatter the chief men over a broad country.
7 He will drink from the brook by the wayside;
Therefore He will lift up His head.

In my view, the modern Sages of Israel have sadly missed the clear implication of this psalm. It is not referring to a mortal man, nor even an exalted human king. I believe it clearly refers to Messiah ben David, the conquering King, whose sword will slay many of his enemies on the day of His appearing. [2]

Let's see how the author of Hebrews interprets this passage as well as the one in today's parasha together.

Heb 5

[2] Isaiah 66:16, Jeremiah 25:33

5 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed
on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer
both gifts and sacrifices for sins; 2 he can deal gently with
the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset
with weakness; 3 and because of it he is obligated to offer
sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. 4
And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when
he is called by God, even as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did
not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who
said to Him,

"Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee";

6 just as He says also in another passage,

"Thou art a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek."

7 In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and
supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to
save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.
8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the
things which He suffered. 9 And having been made perfect,

He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, 10 being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.[3]

11 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God,[4] and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness,[5] for he is a babe. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

So, we can see that so far in Abraham's life there have been many times where he was challenged to get up and go – out of the comfortable, prosperous and familiar, and into the difficult and war-ravaged places.

There were promises of land, uncountable heirs, and blessings, but none seem to have come to Avram by this time of his life. Even the blessing of the full extent of the Promised Land has yet to be fulfilled.

[3] Reference to Psalm 110
[4] Reference to Torah
[5] Reference to Torah

Gen 15:18

> To your descendants I have given this land,
> From the river of Egypt[6] as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.

The author of Hebrews explains that the patriarchs yet await the fulfillment of the full extent of the promises made to them by G-d.

Heb 11:8-11

> 8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

And,

[6] This does not refer to the Nile, as many believe. It refers to another small river which runs along the current southwest border of the current land of Israel – occupying the Wadi El Arish. It was known at that time, and even today, as the "river of Egypt."

Heb 11:13

> 13 All these [including Avram] died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

What is faith? It is believing in what you cannot see, and in fact believing that G-d is true to His nature in spite of the things *that you do see* which are telling you that the words of G-d cannot be true.

You might be called away from your life of comfort, prosperity, and ease… to a life of difficulty, financial struggle, and strife… because G-d tells you to go there. You might even have to move physically and change locations as well. If that is part of His plan for His kingdom, and if you are important to that plan, then do what He says to do.

As it was with Avram, it might be with you as well. Or it could be very different. Regardless, you must know that in order for G-d to do what He needs to do in a certain circumstance or place, He very well may need to move you in one way or another.

He might move you to do something difficult you have not yet done. He might move you to go somewhere that you have never been – or even to a place that you would much rather not go, to do for Him things that you do know how to do. Or it might be something entirely different.

Regardless, be open to hearing His voice instructing you to step outside your comfort zone, and do things for him. They may seem small things at first, but you never know what effect a small thing has upon the overall advancement of the kingdom in this age.

Noah heard the voice of the L-rd and obeyed. Avram heard the voice of the L-rd and obeyed. And He will speak to you as well.

Keep listening. Then arise and walk into the uncomfortable and unfamiliar.