

Maamarei Mordechai

הסביר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Lech Lecha 5786

Mordechai Schlachter

Avraham merited because he believed.

**אִם־מִחוֹט וְעַד שְׁרוֹק־גָּעֵל וְאִם־אָקָה מִכְּל־אִשְׁר־לֹא וְלֹא תֹאמֶר אַנְיִ הַעֲשֵׂרָתִי אֶת־
אַבְרָם:**

“Be it from a thread until a sandal strap, and if I shall take from all that is to you, so you shall not be able to say, ‘I made Avram wealthy.’” (Bereishis 14:23).

Avram refused to take anything offered to him from the victory loot after the Great War of the four kings versus five kings. Why from a thread to a sandal strap? Those seem similar. It should be from a thread to gold. Why did he refuse all reward?

Hashem promised to Avram, “To your children, I shall give this land.” (Ibid 12:7). Later, after returning from Egypt, his and Lot’s wealth (through cattle and flock) was so large, they could not pasture together. (Ibid 13:6). Avram then told Lot to choose where to go and Avram would go elsewhere. (Ibid 13:9). Hashem just told Avram that the Land would be his. Why was he so quick to give some of it away to Lot? Also, why would he limit himself to lands that Lot did not choose?

“And it was chosen to Lot the entire Jordan plane. And Lot traveled from the east.” (Ibid 13:11). Take note of the wording. The pasuk is passive – it was chosen to Lot, not that Lot chose. Also, it was the entire Jordan plane, not part of it. The land was good land, very ripe and lush. (Ibid 13:10). It also says he traveled from the east. However, they seemed to have parted ways from Beth El, which is just north of Yerushalayim. Sodom and the Jordan plane is east of that. The pasuk should have said, he traveled eastward or from the west. Then the pasuk adds, “Avram dwelled in the Land of Canaan and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plane and he pitched his tent up until Sodom.” (Ibid 13:12).

The pasuk is stating that Lot took lands that were not in Eretz Canaan. In fact, Amon and Moav, lands on the eastern bank of the Yarden River, are not in Eretz Canaan and they were never promised to Avraham nor made part of Eretz Yisroel. The Torah explains why Lot ended up there. The Great War took place in the Valley of Siddim which is now the Dead Sea. (Ibid 14:3). There was no sea there yet. It was a valley before Hashem destroyed the four cities. “And Lot raised his eyes and he saw all the planes of the Yarden.” (Ibid 13:10). After Avram told Lot to part from him, Lot went scouting. He traveled eastward across the Yarden and then south. Then he came back westward – from the east – when he saw all the planes of the Yarden. The Torah is making it clear the planes of the Yarden were on the eastern bank of the Yarden. These planes were in and near the Valley of Siddim. These were the lands that would one day be Amon and Moav. It was “up until” Sodom, because Sodom was in Eretz Canaan. Lot came back westward but did not cross the valley back into Canaan. Therefore, Avram was left with all of Eretz Canaan. He had faith in Hashem’s promise to him and Hashem guided Lot out.

How did Avram know that Lot would choose those lands? He did not. That is why the pasuk says, “it was chosen for Lot.” Lot himself also did not choose. However, Hashem already designated lands outside of Eretz Canaan for Lot. Lot went with Avram. (Ibid 12:4). Lot, therefore, as also being part of the family, earned lands of his own. However, Hashem only promised the Land to Avram. (Ibid 12:7). This is one reason why Hashem tells Avram that the Land will be given “to your children.” Meaning, to your children and none of it to Lot. This also explains why later it says, “After Avram separated from Lot, Hashem said to Avram.” (Ibid 13:14). “Because this entire Land that you can see I am going to give to you and your children, for eternity.” (Ibid 13:15). Now, after Lot was away from Avram and out of the picture, Hashem says He will give the Land to Avram himself.

Then came the Great War. Avram gathered his men – three hundred and eighteen of them – and he chased the four kings up north. (Ibid 14:14). Avram was victorious. (Ibid 14:15). Avram did not take anything from the war. He restored all the possessions of the cities of Sodom and Amorah and all of Lot’s possessions. (Ibid 14:16). Then a deal is bargained. The King of Sodom said to Avram, “give to me the souls, and take for yourself the possessions.” (Ibid 14:21). Avram responds by saying he will not take a thread or sandal strap. (Ibid 14:22). While Avram did not take material loot, he actually did take the people into his household. He tells Hashem that his household steward is Eliezer of Damascus.” (Ibid 15:2). Avram defeated the four kings outside of Damascus. (Ibid 14:15). Clearly, he captured this Damascene and kept him, but as a freeman, a householder. (Anecdotally, this proves that the workers Avram had were not slaves. He took this Damascene from war but he kept him as a freeman, calling him his householder. If he took the souls as possessions they would be possessed, i.e., slaves).

After the war, Hashem appears to Avram and again promises that He brought Avram to the Land to inherit it. (Ibid 15:7). Avram asks, “how do I know that I will inherit it?” (Ibid 15:16). This question is not one of lack of faith, but practical. Avram saved the entire Land of Canaan from the Great War threat. The four kings laid waste to the south of Canaan. (Ibid 14:6). Avram chased them out of the Land of Canaan to the north. A victory party was made for Avram and they acknowledge that Avram was the great victor. (Ibid 14:20). By right, Avram now did possess the entire Land of Canaan. However, he returned all of the possessions. He restored the lands and the material wealth to their original owners. That is why he asked Hashem, how will he know? If being victorious in the war was not the way to possess the Land, then what was? The answer: your children will sojourn in a land not their own... (Ibid 15:13).

Avram didn’t take anything, from a thread – that can be discarded without a thought, to a sandal strap – that makes the rest of the shoe useless. He refused to allow the people to think they made him wealthy or owner of the Land. He tells the king, “From all that is to you.” You think you own it all. I will not take it. Only Hashem would give Avram the Land and he wanted everyone to know that only Hashem will. He had such faith in the promises that Hashem made to him he let Lot wander and he returned all the loot. He would not take anything from man. He waited for Hashem to fulfill the promise. That was Avram’s faith and great merit.