
THE TANACH STUDY CENTER mail.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Questions for Self Study - by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT LECH LECHA

PART I - QUESTIONS FOR THE 'SHABBOS TABLE'

'GOYIM' FOR JEWS, OR JEWS FOR 'GOYIM'

1. As you probably recall, at the beginning of Parshat Lech Lecha, God speaks to Avraham Avinu for the first time, promising him that he will become a great nation, and instructing him to leave his homeland to travel to the 'promised land'.

To the best of your recollection, does the Torah ever explain why specifically **Avraham** was chosen to become this nation?

If so, where (and why)?

If not, can you explain why not?

Are you familiar with Midrashim that do explain why?

Can you explain why the Midrash deals with this topic?

2. When the Torah describes God's choice of Avraham Avinu, does it also explain **why** he was chosen, i.e. towards what purpose (or goal)?

If so, how does his 'being chosen' relate to that purpose?

Review 12:1-3, noting what God tells Avraham. Construct a list of these various statements, categorizing them either as commands, promises, or just 'information'.

If your list includes 'promises', did you understand them as 'reward'? If so, why is Avraham being rewarded?

If not, why is God making him those promises? Do they relate in any manner to 'why' Avraham has been chosen?

3. Is there any thematic connection (that you can think of) between God's choice of Avraham Avinu at the beginning of Parshat Lech Lecha, and any (or all) of the events that took place in Chumash beforehand (i.e. in chapters 1 thru 11)?

In your opinion (based on your understanding of Parshat Lech Lecha), what came first:

* God's decision that He wants to create a special nation, and then His choice of Avraham; or

* Avraham's great character, and hence God's decision to reward him with a 'promised land' and his own nation.

How would your answer to the above question affect the manner in which you understand the purpose of the Jewish people?

4. Review Breishit 18:17-19, while noting the rather obvious parallel between 18:18 and Breishit 12:1-3. Be sure you understand how and why these two sets of psukim relate to one another.

In what manner does 18:19 explain God's purpose in His choice of Avraham to become a nation? Based on that pasuk, would you say that Avraham (and hence Am Yisrael) was chosen in 'reward' for something, or towards a 'purpose'?

Relate this as well to your answers to the above questions.

See Yeshayahu 42:5-6 (the opening lines of the Haftara for Parshat Breishit, and not by chance). How do these psukim relate to the above questions?

How would this 'purpose' relate to the reason why Bnei Yisrael remain God's chosen nation forever, even though they may sin? How does it explain why God threatens to punish them so severely when they do sin?

WHO'S LAUGHING?

1. We are all familiar with the fact that Sarah 'laughed' (see 18:11-12) when she first heard the news that she would have a son (even though she was 90) - and hence the baby was named Yitzchak.

Were you aware that Avraham also had 'laughed' when he

first heard this news at an earlier time? To confirm this, read 17:15-19. Then compare those psukim to 18:9-15. How are the reactions of Avraham and Sarah similar and how are they different?

Re: Sarah's reaction and its contrast to that of Avraham; see Chizkuni, Radak, and Seforno on 18:12.

'MI-KEDEM' & GAN EDEN

1. In chapter 13 - when Lot leaves Avraham Avinu, the Torah describes the direction of his departure with the word 'mi-kedem' (see 13:11). Considering that Lot was traveling from the mountain range towards the **east**, what is problematic with this pasuk?

2. There are several other instances when the same word is used to describe other earlier events in Chumash. For example, note the meaning of mi-kedem (and 'kidmat') in 3:24, 4:16 & 11:2.

What is the context of each of these psukim in relation to man's relationship with God?

Relate this to the Midrash Aggadh that Rashi quotes in his commentary to 13:11 (re: 'va-yisa Lot mi-kedem')!

PART II - QUESTIONS FOR PREPARATION
(for this week's shiurim)

LOT'S DEPARTURE

1. As you study Parshat Lech Lecha, make a list of the main topic(s) of each 'parshia'. As you review each story, note each time that God speaks to Avraham Avinu in regard to his future. [Be sure to notice 12:1-7, 13:14-17; 15:1-20; and 17:1-22.]

In each instance, try to determine the primary topic (and purpose) of each conversation. Do you find a 'progression' of any type from one conversation to the next, or does each conversation deal with a different topic?

How often to find what appears to be a repeat of an original promise? Can you explain why?

2. As you make your list, answer the following questions concerning each "hitgalut" [revelation]:

a. What event preceded this hitgalut?

b. What specific Name the Torah uses to describe God.

c. What does God promise Avraham Avinu?

d. If a **covenant** is involved, what is its nature? [What are the two sides of each covenant, or is it one-sided?]

As your review your list, note what theme is common to each "hitgalut", and in what manner each hitgalut is unique.

Finally, review each of the narratives that precede each hitgalut, and then attempt to understand how those events relate to the hitgalut that follows.

3. Review 12:10 thru 13:18, noting how these psukim discuss two very different stories, yet constitute only one parshia. Attempt to identify a common topic or theme that would explain why both of these topics are included in the same parshia. [In other words - what is the thematic connection between Avraham's journey to Egypt and Lot's departure to Sedom].

4. What is unique about what Avraham does at the site called Bet-El in chapters 12 and 13? In your answer, relate to 12:8 and 13:1-4 and the phrase 'vayikra be-**shem** Hashem' and the 'mizbeiach'.

Relate this to our study of the word 'shem' in 4:26, 10:1, and 11:4 (see TSC shiur on Parshat Noach), and as explained by Ramban on 12:8.

Based on 13:1-4 and the continuation of this story in 13:5-13, where (near what city) does the hitgalut in 13:14-18 take place? Why would this be significant?

Compare 13:14-18 to 28:13-22, and note the similarities!

5. Why do you think that the Torah calls this place 'Bet El'? In your opinion, was that the real name of that city at that time? If not, why would Chumash refer to it by that name?

In your answer, relate to Breishit 28:16-22 (& 35:14-15), and to when Sefer Breishit was first given to Bnei Yisrael (i.e. at Har Sinai)!

6. Is there any reason for Avraham to consider Lot as his successor? If so, explain why. In your answer, relate to 11:27-31, 12:4-6, and also to 13:1.

Why does Lot choose to 'leave' Avraham?

Does he take Avraham's offer in 13:8-9 (see Targum Unkelos of 'yemin u-smol!'), or does he make a different choice? If so, what is so bad about this choice?

[See Rashi on 13:11.]

Review Devarim 11:10-13, and note its thematic connection to Breishit 13:10. Be sure that you can explain why 'kikar ha-Yarden' [the Jordan River Valley] is compared to 'Eretz Mitzrayim' and 'gan Hashem'.

BRIT BEIN HA-BTARIM & BRIT MILA

1. Based on Avraham's question in 15:2-3, what does God assume that he worried about (as implicit in 15:1)?

How does this fear relate to the events that transpired in chapter 14?

2. Note how often the word 'yerusha' (or a similar "shoresh") is found in the first eight psukim of chapter 15. Explain its meaning and context in these psukim.

Then, note the use of this same shoresh 'y.r.sh.' in Bamidbar 33:50-53 (and in Shmot 6:8) and their context. How does this word relate to conquest and sovereignty?

How can this help explain the thematic connection between chapters 14 and 15?

3. Based on 15:1-7, how do you understand Avraham's question (or request) in 15:8? In your answer, relate to how God answers this question.

Where is God's answer to Avraham's question in 15:8?

Does it begin in 15:9 or in 15:13? Explain!

In your opinion, is Avraham surprised by this answer?

Can you explain why this answer concludes with a 'brit' in 15:18? How does this "brit" relate to 15:9-11?

4. Review the psukim that describe 'brit mila' in 17:1-10. According to these psukim, what is the primary element and purpose of this covenant?

What is special about God's various names in 17:1-2? Has God ever spoken unto Avraham b'shem Elokim until this time? Similarly, is this the first time that we find the Name "kel-shakkai"?

Note Ramban's explanation of the Name 'Kel Shakkai' in his commentary to 17:1.

5. As you review 17:1-10, carefully attempt to follow the flow of topic. In your opinion, does God's promise that Avraham will be a "av hamon goyim" - the father of many nations etc. (see 17:5-6) - relate only to his children from Sarah, or also to his offspring from Hagar & Ketura?

Relate your answer to what God explains to Avraham in 17:19-21! Relate this as well to 25:1-18 and chapter 36.

To whom does the covenant in 17:7-10 refer to?

6. Explain why 17:7-8 describe the essence of this covenant. How do these psukim relate to Breishit 9:11-12? [Note the rather obvious parallels.] How does this parallel explain the connection between the "brit" - and the "ot brit" - the sign of the covenant - as described in 17:9-11?

7. Note how God promises the land of Israel to Avraham, both in brit bein ha-btarim (15:18-20) and at brit mila (see 17:7-8).

What is the 'definition' [or borders] of the land that God promises Avraham Avinu in each brit? Do they appear to be identical, or quite different?

In your answer, relate as well to Breishit 10:15-20, noting how those psukim describe the 'land of Canaan'.

6. In summary, how has our understanding of God's original promise to Avraham Avinu in 12:1-3 been enhanced by the details in chapters 13 thru 17?

PART III - PARSHANUT

Avraham's Mizbeiach

1. Read 12:8, regarding the 'mizbeiach' that Avraham built.

a) What difficulty exists in the text regarding the location of Avraham's mizbeiach?

b) How is this mizbeiach different than the mizbeiach which he built in Shchem (see 12:6-7)

c) How does Rashi answer these two questions?

2. Now see Ramban on 12:7 and 12:8.

a) Does he answer any of the above two questions?

b) What similarities and differences exist between the approaches of Rashi and Ramban?

c) Which of these two commentaries confines itself to the 'local' parshia, and which takes into account the theme of the entire Sefer?

3. Rashi relates this pasuk to the future defeat that Avraham's descendants would suffer at the city of Ai. Recall that this defeat was the direct result of Achan's sin at Yericho (see Yehoshua, chapter 7). When considering the nature of this sin, can you find a thematic connection between the positions of Rashi and Ramban?

The Promise of Children

4. Read 15:1-8. Try to follow the flow of the psukim, and their relation to the events in chapter 14.

Why do Rashi and Chizkuni (on 15:1) and Rashbam (on 22:1) all insist that this parshia is directly related to the war between the kings in chapter 14?

According to each of these commentators, how does this explain:

Avraham's fear as implicit in God's statement "al tira"

God's protection ('Anochi magen lach'), and

Avraham's reward - 'secharcha harbeh me'od'

How do these commentaries relate what takes place later on in chapter 15?

Based on the above, are 'Anochi magen lach' and 'secharcha harbeh me'od' referring to the same thing or two different things? See also Seforno & Ibn Ezra.

5. Explain two possible ways to understand 'va-yachsheveh lo tzedaka' in 15:6. [Who considered this 'tzedaka'?

See Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Seforno (and, if you want, Rasag and Radak.) On what point do they all agree, on what points do they differ?

How does this affect your understanding of the word tzedaka? Pay careful attention to Ibn Ezra on this.

Next, see Ramban (and Chizkuni). Explain why Ramban disagrees with Rashi, and with almost all of the other commentators.

At the end, Ramban offers an alternative explanation (beginning with 'o yomar ki Avraham he'emin....'). In your opinion, does Ramban return at this point to Rashi's commentary?

Return now to Ibn Ezra's commentary.

Could Ibn Ezra's explanation of tzedaka fit into any of the interpretations raised by Ramban?

In your opinion, which explanation (Ramban or the others) fits in best with the flow of the psukim? (Be sure to take into account 15:7-8.)

6. From a philosophical perspective, what fundamental point does Ramban raise here in regard to God's choice of Am Yisrael? Relate your answer to the questions re: the underlying purpose of God's choice of Avraham Avinu, as raised in Part One (above).

be-hatzlacha,
menachem