5786 - Genesis 12-17 - Lech Lecha (Go forth)

Genesis 12:1-5

[1]The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. [2]"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. [3]I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

[4]So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. [5]He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

GOD'S ELECTION OF ABRAHAM[1]

The story of Abraham opens without an identifying formula or preliminary observation of the type that introduces the Noah narrative. The patriarch bursts upon the scene of history with astounding suddenness. **The first seventy-five years of his life are passed over in total silence**. God's call comes in an instant, without forewarning or preparation. It is brief and compelling in its demands, and Abram's immediate response marks the true beginning of his life. The momentous events unfold with startling rapidity, and any introductory embellishment could only have a diminishing effect.

THE DIVINE CALL AND THE PROMISES (vv. 1-3)

1. ***the LORD Said to Abram*** The divine silence that persisted for ten generations is shattered. **The voice that first set Creation in motion and that, when last heard by man, brought a message of hope and blessing to the human race (9:8-17) resounds once more**. This time it is at Haran, where, for some unexplained reason, **the intended migration of Terah and family from Ur to Canaan had come to a halt**.

Go forth Hebrew *lekh lekha*. The preposition ***l*** gives the verb ***h-l-k***, "to walk, go," the sense of "separating, taking leave of."

Exodus 18:24-27

[24]Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. [25]He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people ... [27]Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro **returned** to his own country.

1 Nahum M. Sarna, Gen. Ed., *The JPS Torah Commentary, Genesis*, (The Jewish Publication Society), pp. 88-90.

Joshua 22:4

[4]Now that the LORD your God has given them rest as he promised, **return** to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan.

your native land Rather, "the land of your kinsmen."[(2)] The reference is not to Ur, as in 11:28 but to Haran, precisely as in 24:4.

(2) While Heb. *moledet* means "birth" in Ezek. 16:3f., the term means "progeny" in Gen.48:6, "family, kindred" in Gen. 43:7; Ruth 1:11; Esther 2:10, 20.

The enormity of God's demand and the agonizing nature of the decision to be made are effectively conveyed through the cluster of terms arranged in ascending order according to the severity of the sacrifice involved: **country, extended family, nuclear family**.

your father's house Terah lived on another sixty years after Abram departed from Haran, as is clear from 11:26, 32 and 12:4.

to the land **It is unclear whether Abram knew from the outset the identity of the promised land**. It is possible that he continued the westward migration that his father had interrupted (11:31) and arrived in Canaan unaware that he had reached his goal until so informed by God (12:7). Alternatively, God may have revealed the destination as soon as Abram accepted the call. One way or the other, God's word transformed the trek into a wholly new venture, now under divine guidance and purpose, completely disengaged from the earlier undertaking. The original segment of the journey from Ur to Haran could henceforth be viewed from a different perspective and also be seen as part of God's scheme of history, so that **it is possible to speak of God having brought Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans, as in Genesis 15:7 and Nehemiah 9:7, even though the call came in Haran**.

2. God's call is accompanied by a comprehensive set of promises that contain seven elements. These are:

(i) **I will make of you a great nation** That is, **great in number and significance**. The nature of the promise—that it could not be realized in the lifetime of the recipient because of Sarai's childlessness and the couple's advanced age—should all have combined to strain credulity to the breaking point. **The magnitude of Abram's act of faith in accepting the divine word is thus implicit in the narrative**. Over a thousand years later, it is invoked in a prophetic oration as a challenge to an Israel then plunged into despair and disbelief: "Look back to Abraham your father/ **And to Sarah** who brought you forth. / For he was only one when I called him, / But I blessed him and made him many" (Isa. 51:2).

Genesis 18:20

[20]Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is **so great** and their sin so grievous.

Genesis 46:3

[3]"I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a **great** nation there.

Deuteronomy 4:6-8

[6]Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this **great** nation is a wise and understanding people." [7]What other nation is so **great** as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? [8]And what other nation is so **great** as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

Deuteronomy 26:5

[5]Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a **great** nation, **powerful and numerous**.

(ii) ***I will bless you*** You will enjoy material prosperity.

Deuteronomy 7:13ff

[13]He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers. He will bless the fruit of your womb, the crops of your land—your grain, new wine and olive oil—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you. [14]**You will be blessed more than any other people**; none of your men or women will be childless, nor will any of your livestock be without young. [15]The LORD will keep you free from every disease. He will not inflict on you the horrible diseases you knew in Egypt, but he will inflict them on all who hate you.

(iii) ***I will make your name great*** In the ancient Near East, **the name was not merely a convenient designation but an expression of the very essence of being**. Hence, this promise means not only that Abraham will acquire fame but also that he will be highly esteemed as a man of superior character.

(iv) ***you shall be a blessing*** As a consequence, you will serve as the standard by which a blessing is invoked.

Genesis 20:7

[7](God said to Abimelech) "Now return the (Abraham's) wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die."

3. (v) ***I will bless those who bless you*** Those who wish you well and who demonstrate solidarity with you will enjoy God's blessing of well-being.

(vi) ***And curse him that curses you*** He who mistreats you will inevitably incur misfortune. The English translation obscures the distinction between the two different Hebrew verbs employed here. The verb ***k-l-l***, referring to the offender's action, means "to disparage, abuse, cause harm"; ***a'-r-r***, referring to God's response, has the much stronger connotation of "to place under a ban, to deprive of the benefits of divine providence," and it is the only term employed in curse formulas. Its power can be gauged by its use in the great covenant-affirming ceremony enjoined in Deuteronomy 27. In other words, because the patriarch will be an unprotected stranger in an alien land, he will have particular need of God's providential care, and **whoever maltreats him will be punished with exceptional severity**.

It should be noted that the Hebrew has a contrast in number between "**those** who bless" and "**he** that curses," Radak[2] and others explain this to mean that Abram's detractors will be few.

(vii) ***And all the families of the earth/ Shall bless themselves by you*** This rendering under stands Hebrew *v'nivrechu* as reflexive. People will take your own good fortune as the desired measure when invoking a blessing on themselves. A more likely translation of the verb **is as a passive**: "**shall be blessed through—(*or*) because of—you**." God's promises to Abram would then proceed in three stages **from the particular to the universal**: a blessing on Abram personally, a blessing (or curse) on those with whom he interacts, **a blessing on the entire human race**.

These promises to Abram, given in Haran, make no mention of a gift of land, perhaps so as not to detract from the pure, disinterested act of faith involved in heeding the simple command, "Go forth!"

ABRAM'S RESPONSE (vv. 4-5)

In silent, unwavering obedience to the divine will, "as the LORD had commanded him," the patriarch picks himself up and goes forth, accepting his new destiny in perfect faith.

4 ***Lot went with him*** He agreed to go. The mention of Lot prepares the reader for a subsequent episode (chap. 13).

seventy-five years old Recording the age of the patriarch at crucial moments of his life is a characteristic feature of the narrative.

Genesis 16:16

[16]Abram was **eighty-six years old** when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

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2 David Kimchi (1160–1235), also known by the Hebrew acronym as the RaDaK (רַדָּ״ק) (Rabbi David Kimchi), was a medieval rabbi, biblical commentator, philosopher, and grammarian.

Genesis 17:1

[1]When Abram was **ninety-nine years old**, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless.

Genesis 17:24

[24]Abraham was **ninety-nine years old** when he was circumcised,

Genesis 21:5

[5]Abraham was a **hundred years old** when his son Isaac was born to him.

5. ***his brother's son Lot*** The kinship description explains his presence in Abram's entourage. **The oldest uncle assumed the guardianship of the child of his dead brother**, which is clear in I4:12.

wealth ... persons These are mentioned in anticipation of the ensuing narrative (v. 16). Abram's affluence does not derive from Pharaoh's gift.

5. ***they set out ... they arrived*** The verse duplicates the phrascology and structure of 11:3I. They make a fresh start, and this time they arrive in Canaan. Although the text does not report the precise details of the route from Haran to Shechem, all available possibilities would have taken them through or near some of the great urban centers of the day. Since Haran lay on the banks of the Balikh River, a tributary of the Euphrates, they most likely traveled southward along the Balikh Valley in order to reach the grcat cast-west arterial road that led from Ur, Babylon, and Accad to Mari, where it branched into two. They then could either have taken the upper branch, leading west to Aleppo, and then veered south past Qatna and Damascus, or they could have continued southward to the oasis of Tadmor (Palmyra) on the lower branch and then turned southwestward along the road to Damascus.

Either way, they could have continued on to Hazor, a major commercial and military center, strategically placed in Upper Galilee at the junction of ancient and important roads leading to some of the main cities of Canaan. **The narrative is silent concerning the route and the incidents on the journey in order to avoid diverting attention from the primary theme, which is the entry into the land and the first theophany, or divine revelation, that the patriarch experiences**.

1. *The patriarch bursts upon the scene of history with astounding suddenness.* ***The first seventy-five years of his life are passed over in total silence.***

   a. Matthew 1-3

   [1]This is the genealogy of Yeshua the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham ... [2:1]After Yeshua was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ... [3:1]In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea.

   b. Mark 1:1-2

   [1]The beginning of the good news about Yeshua the Messiah, the Son of God, [2]as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" ...

   c. Luke 1-3

   Chapters 1-2 deal with the birth of Yochanan HaMatbil (John the Baptist). Chapter 3 deals with the beginning of Yochanan's ministry and the genealogy of Yeshua.

   d. Luke 4

   [1]Yeshua, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness (to be tempted) ...

2. ***to the land*** ***It is unclear whether Abram knew from the outset the identity of the promised land.*** *It is possible that he continued the westward migration that his father had interrupted (11:31) and arrived in Canaan unaware that he had reached his goal until so informed by God (12:7). Alternatively, God may have revealed the destination as soon as Abram accepted the call.*

   a. Hebrews 11:8-12

   [8]By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, **even though he did not know where he was going**. [9]By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. [10]For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. [11]And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. [12]And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

3. *(iii)* ***I will make your name great*** *In the ancient Near East,* ***the name was not merely a convenient designation but an expression of the very essence of being****. Hence, this promise means not only that Abraham will acquire fame but also that he will be highly esteemed as a man of superior character.*

   a. In English (and Greek) "a name is **a term used for identification** by an external observer. They can identify a class or category of things, or a single thing, either uniquely, or within a given context."[3]

   b. **In Hebrew, the word "name" involves existence, character, attributes and reputation**.

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3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Name

1) 1Kings 18:23-24

[23]Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets choose one for themselves and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. [24]Then **you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD**. The god who answers by fire—he is God." Then all the people said, "What you say is good."

a) "Calling" on the "name" of the LORD does NOT mean calling God by His Name but acknowledging and appealing to His character.

2) 2Kings 5:10-12

[10]Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed." [11]But Na'aman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand **and call on the name of the LORD his God**, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. [12]Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

a) Na'aman expected Elisha to appeal to the God of Israel's gracious and compassionate character and heal him.

3) Hebrews 13:12-16

[12]And so Yeshua also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. [13]Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. [14]For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. [15]Through Yeshua, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that **openly profess his name**. [16]And do not forget **to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased**.

a) How do we "openly profess (Yeshua's) name?"—by simply repeating it over and over or by concluding our prayers with the superstitious formula, "In Jesus' name, Amen" thinking that these words are what makes the prayer "effective." NO—by acting in a way that affirms our recognition and appreciation of what Yeshua has done in our lives.

4) Acts 2:37-38

[37]When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" [38]Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, **in the name of Yeshua the Messiah** for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

a) This too does NOT mean to immerse oneself in a *mikvah* saying the name of "Yeshua" as one does so—but doing so because one recognizes and appreciates what God has done on our behalf through Yeshua the Messiah.

5) Acts 3:6

[6]Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. **In the name of Yeshua** the Messiah of Nazareth, walk."

a) "In the name of ...", i.e., "*by the authority of*," or "*by the authorization of*" or "*by the power of*" ...

4. ***(vii) And all the families of the earth/ Shall bless themselves by you***

This rendering under stands Hebrew v'nivrechu as reflexive. People will take your own good fortune as the desired measure when invoking a blessing on themselves. A more likely translation of the verb ***is as a passive: "shall be blessed through—(or) because of—you."*** *God's promises to Abram would then proceed in three stages* ***from the particular to the universal****: a blessing on Abram personally, a blessing (or curse) on those with whom he interacts,* ***a blessing on the entire human race.***

a. John 4:14

but **whoever** drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

1) Romans 10:12-13

[12]For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—**the same Lord is Lord of all** and richly blesses all who call on him, [13]for, "**Everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:32).

a) Joel 2:32

[32]And **everyone** who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

2) Acts 13:26—Paul speaking in the Jewish synagogue in Antioch

[26]"Fellow **children of Abraham AND you God-fearing Gentiles**, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent.

Galatians 3:7-8

[7]Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. [8]**Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you**" (Gen 12:3).