
א ביסל תורה!

The Maimonides School Parsha Newsletter

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לך לך

Candle Lighting: 5:15

ברית בין הבתרים The Dual Prophecy of the

By Robbie Jaffe

In this week's פרשה, לך לך, one of the most significant events in Jewish history happened: The ברית בין הבתרים - the covenant. On countless occasions later in the תנ"ך the Jews ask to be saved or aided by ה' if not for their deeds, then for the covenants with our forefathers. The most foretelling of the covenants of our forefathers was this one. However what is today referred to as the ברית בין הבתרים may have actually been two prophecies.

The first prophecy is ו'א'ו. בראשית ט' starts by telling אברהם not to fear because his reward will be very great. Do not fear *what*? According to ספורנו and רמב"ן, the previous פרק details the war of the four kings against the five kings, so this is to comfort אברהם over his fears that the four kings will try to get revenge on him due to his alignment with the five kings during the war. He comforts אברהם by promising him that he will have many descendants. This could be a different prophecy from the second half of the פרק. The second prophecy is not אברהם's because in פסוק ו', it says that אברהם put his trust in ה', which therefore ended his need for reassurance from ה'.

Further evidence to support this theory appears in ו'ט'ז where ה' says to אברהם that He is ה' who brought you out of ארץ כשדים to give you this land (ישראל). Why does ה' need to remind אברהם that he is ה' if אברהם is already in the midst of receiving a prophecy? Furthermore, by saying that he is giving the land of Israel to אברהם, He is introducing the topic of this prophecy again! Sure enough, He talks about the Jews leaving Egypt and returning to the land that ה' is promising to אברהם's descendants, hence relating to the introductory verse of this second prophecy that ה' is giving אברהם's descendants the land of ישראל.

Another thing that shows the פרק is made up of two different prophecies, is that the prophecies are answering two different questions. The first prophecy is answering the question, **Who** will be my descendants. While the second prophecy is answering the question of **How** will my descendants possess the land of ישראל. In both cases ה' promises אברהם something and אברהם wants reassurance that those promises aren't just theoretical. As such ה' provides the answer and reassures אברהם that they will happen. The two different prophecies don't only have two different promises, but they also have two different questions, and two different answers.

3800 years later, the אברהם's prophecies have already occurred. We who live today are but a small fraction of the many "stars" that have been (and will be) אברהם's descendants, and nearly half the Jews in the world live in Israel, the land that was (and is) promised to אברהם. Regardless of whether or not this פרק consists of one prophecy or two, the influence of these prophecies is unparalleled, and have influenced events even thousands of years later.

אברהם The Incentives of

By Ephraim Fischer

In the beginning of this week's פרשה, לך לך, ה' commands אברהם to leave חרן and go to the land of כנען. The פסוקים ה'; פסוקים ה' tells אברהם that if he does this, he will become a great nation, he will be blessed, along with many other blessings. Was this really a hard test? אברהם is getting so much in return for completing this one task, so what makes this test so monumental?

To find an answer to this question, we need to look at other cases of people leaving their settled places. When the Jews left Egypt, there was a certain population of Jews who stayed. The מכילתא, a מדרש הלכה says that the language of the word "חמושים" means that only one fifth of the Jews left Egypt. Four fifths of the Jews were never going to leave Egypt, therefore they were killed in מכת חושך. However, why would they ever want to stay in Egypt? They were enslaved, so why would they refuse liberation? שמות רבה answers this question by saying that some of the Jews had Egyptian wives, and they were living in wealth. Therefore, they didn't want to leave all of this for a journey through the desert. The main point of this מדרש is not that they wanted to stay with their wealth; rather, it is to show how they didn't want to leave their comfort to travel with their brethren. They had perfectly good lives in Egypt, and they didn't want to follow משה through this treacherous journey through the desert. It was a risk which they weren't willing to take.

In עזרא, it also says that only a small portion of Jews came back to Israel, to the second המקדש. One of the main reasons for this was because they were comfortable in בבל. Why should they leave someplace where they lived for many years, just to see the המקדש? They felt that it was more comfortable for them to stay in בבל, away from the המקדש, than to enter ישראל, which has the המקדש.

In both of these cases, there are two choices: The Jews can either go someplace where they will be rewarded, or they can stay put where they are, and not take any chances. Here too, אברהם was comfortable in חרן. His whole family was there, all of his possessions were there, and it would be very hard for him to move. On the other hand, if he moves, he receives all of these blessings which ה' promised him. The intrinsic value of the test wasn't whether אברהם would move; it was whether he would listen to ה' and go on this treacherous journey, or if he would stay put, in the comfort of his home. אברהם decided to go, so he passed this test.

To preface this next opinion, I'd like to discuss the phrase נעשה ונשמע. When we were at הר סיני, before we received the תורה, משה read aloud the ספר הברית, the ספר התורה until מתן תורה. When משה read this, the people responded with "נעשה ונשמע", that they will perform ה's actions, and then they will listen. They will follow ה's orders without listening first. ספורנו comments on this, saying that it's a reference to the fact that they will follow ה's directions, not because they are receiving a reward, rather they are following ה's directions to just listen to Him. This test, that ה' is giving אברהם, has the same concept. The test wasn't about leaving חרן. The test was about why he would leave. If he would leave for the reward, or if he would leave in order to follow ה'. In the next Pasuk, it says, "וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהִים", that אברהם went to כנען just like ה' commanded him. This would seem to indicate that the reason that אברהם went wasn't because of the rewards. Rather, he went because ה' told him to. This means that according to this interpretation, אברהם still passed the test.

Doing a מצוה לשמה, because you want to serve ה', has a much greater reward in עולם הבא than doing it for a reward in this world. This is one of the first places in תנ"ך where this is shown. אברהם has all of this wealth and incentive to travel because of the reward, but he chose to do it to worship ה'. If we have a choice between our earthly desires and ה', may we all act like אברהם and choose ה'.

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