לֶךְ־לְךָ

Parashat Lech Lecha

Genesis 12:1–17:27 · Shabbat 24 October 2026 · 13 Cheshvan 5787

Love of the land, pursuit of peace

Abram has just been promised the land, and he gives Lot first choice of it. Uriel Simon on the first of Abraham's contradictions.

THE TEXT

GENESIS 13:7–9

וַיְהִי־רִ֗יב בֵּין֙ רֹעֵ֣י מִקְנֵה־אַבְרָ֔ם וּבֵ֖ין רֹעֵ֣י מִקְנֵה־לֹ֑וט וְהַֽכְּנַעֲנִ֥י וְהַפְּרִזִּ֖י אָ֣ז יֹשֵׁ֥ב בָּאָֽרֶץ׃ וַיֹּ֤אמֶר אַבְרָם֙ אֶל־לֹ֔וט אַל־נָ֥א תְהִ֛י מְרִיבָ֖ה בֵּינִ֣י וּבֵינֶ֑ךָ וּבֵ֤ין רֹעַי֙ וּבֵ֣ין רֹעֶ֔יךָ כִּֽי־אֲנָשִׁ֥ים אַחִ֖ים אֲנָֽחְנוּ׃ הֲלֹ֨א כָל־הָאָ֜רֶץ לְפָנֶ֗יךָ הִפָּֽרֶד־נָ֙א֙ מֵעָלָ֔י אִם־הַשְּׂמֹאל֙ וְאֵימְנָ֔ה וְאִם־הַיָּמִ֖ין וְאַשְׂמְאִילָֽה׃

And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle. And the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt then in the land. And Abram said unto Lot: 'Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me; if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou take the right hand, then I will go to the left.'

GENESIS 13:14–15

וַיהוָ֗ה אָמַר֙ אֶל־אַבְרָ֔ם אַחֲרֵ֖י הִפָּֽרֶד־לֹ֑וט מֵעִמּ֗וֹ שָׂ֚א נָ֣א עֵינֶ֔יךָ וּרְאֵ֕ה מִן־הַמָּקוֹם֙ אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּ֣ה שָׁ֔ם צָפֹ֥נָה וָנֶ֖גְבָּה וָקֶ֥דְמָה וָיָֽמָּה׃ כִּ֣י אֶת־כָּל־הָאָ֗רֶץ אֲשֶׁ֤ר אַתָּה֙ רֹאֶ֔ה לְךָ֥ אֶתְּנֶ֖נָּה וּלְזַרְעֲךָ֑ עַד־עוֹלָֽם׃

And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him: 'Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.'

IN HIS WORDS

> הניגוד הראשון הוא, במונחי העגה הפוליטית שלנו, הניגוד שבין "אהבת הארץ" מכאן ו"רדיפת שלום" מכאן.
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> *The first contrast is, in the terms of our political jargon, the contrast between "love of the land" on the one side and "pursuit of peace" on the other.*

> צדקתו של אברהם, לעומת זאת, היא בגדר משימה
>
> *Abraham's righteousness, by contrast, is a task.* (on Genesis 17:1, "walk before Me, and be wholehearted")

> שאלות השעה באור המקרא, המקרא באור שאלות השעה
>
> *The questions of the hour in the light of the Bible; the Bible in the light of the questions of the hour.* (the subtitle Simon gave the book in which this essay appears)

THE TEACHING

Abram has just been promised the land (12:7) and has walked its length, building altars at Shechem and between Beth-el and Ai. Then his herdsmen and Lot's come to blows over pasture, and the Torah adds a detail that makes the quarrel more dangerous, not less: *"the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt then in the land"*. Abram's answer is to give away first choice: הֲלֹא כָל־הָאָרֶץ לְפָנֶיךָ, "Is not the whole land before thee?"

Uriel Simon named the tension in the vocabulary of Israeli politics: *"the first contrast is, in the terms of our political jargon, the contrast between "love of the land" on the one side and "pursuit of peace" on the other."* He was not a neutral reader. He was one of the founders of Oz VeShalom, the religious-Zionist peace movement, and he called the book this essay appears in *Bakesh Shalom Verodfehu*, "Seek peace and pursue it." But his point about Abraham is that the Torah does not let either value win. The man who yields first choice is the same man who walks the land, builds its altars and is promised it.

Read the next verses. The promise is renewed not before Abram gives way but straight after: *"the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him: Lift up now thine eyes ... for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it"* (13:14–15). Abram gets the view in every direction once he has stopped insisting on any one of them.

Simon came back to this all his life. In "The Biblical Destinies: Conditional Promises" (*Tradition*, 1978) he asked whether the Bible's promises of the land are absolute or conditional, and used Abraham to separate a people's natural attachment to its land from the attachment that comes with being chosen for it. The parasha ends with the verse that frames both: הִתְהַלֵּךְ לְפָנַי וֶהְיֵה תָמִים (17:1). Abraham's righteousness, Simon wrote, *"is a task"*, and so, on this reading, is the land.

FOR THE TABLE

- Abram says, "we are brethren." Is he describing what they are, or what he wants them to be?
- Does giving Lot first choice weaken Abram's claim to the land, or is it how he makes the claim?
- Where do two things you love, a place and peace with the people around you, pull against each other? Do you choose, or hold both?

פרופ׳ אוריאל סימון ז״ל

Uriel Simon (Jerusalem, 1929 – 30 September 2026) taught Bible at Bar-Ilan University for decades. He read the Bible through its medieval interpreters, above all Abraham ibn Ezra, and wrote *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms*, *Reading Prophetic Narratives* and the JPS commentary on Jonah. He won the Bialik Prize, and he was one of the founders of Oz VeShalom, the religious-Zionist peace movement. This reader takes one text and one of his teachings each week.

READ SIMON HIMSELF

אברהם המקראי – הברכה שבניגודים (Biblical Abraham: The Blessing of Contradictions), from *Seek Peace and Pursue It (Yedioth Ahronoth, 2002)*, the essay quoted on this sheet.

"The Religious Significance of the Peshat," *Tradition* 23:2 (1988), trans. Edward L. Greenstein.

"The Biblical Destinies: Conditional Promises," *Tradition* 17:2 (1978).