

Parshat Lech Lecha

October 31, 2014

This week's Shabbat Message was written by NYL Cabinet member Jason Wuliger from Cleveland.

Dear *Chevre*,

This week's *parsha* means a lot to me. This was the *parsha* for my grandfather's Bar Mitzvah, my uncle's Bar Mitzvah, several of my cousins' Bar Mitzvot and mine. For my family, *Lech Lecha* is a unique way of carrying out *l'dor vador*. Hold on to your hats, because it's a doozy!

During this portion, Abram becomes Abraham, Sarai becomes Sarah, and the covenant is established between us, as their descendants, and Hashem. We are also promised the land of Israel. Seems like enough right there, right? Well the journey, as is so often true, is most of the story. Note: I will refer to our patriarch and matriarch throughout this message by the names Hashem gave them even though he doesn't bestow the names upon them until he promises to bless them with Isaac near the end of this *parsha*.

At the word of Hashem, Abraham leaves his household at the age of 75 with his wife and his nephew, Lot, to go to what was then Canaan. After he arrives he travels south, and continues on as a great famine is consuming the land. He gets to Egypt and grows concerned that the Egyptians will find his wife so irresistible that they will kill him in order to be with her. Overlooking the fact that Sarah was in her sixties at the time, he takes a step that not many modern wives would be pleased with: he asks that she say that she is his sister so that, even though she will still be taken from him, they won't kill him as part of the process.

Sure enough, Pharaoh is struck by Sarah and marries her. The good news is that Sarah and Abraham are blessed and Pharaoh is cursed for marrying the already married Sarah. Pharaoh gives Sarah back to Abraham before the marriage is consummated, along with great riches, and sends them on their way. I would like to believe that Abraham knew this was how it would play out the whole time.

Abraham, Sarah, and Lot return to the Promised Land, now so rich, with so many servants and possessions, that they can no longer live near each other. Abraham allows Lot to choose where he prefers to live and then agrees to go in the opposite direction. Lot makes what I believe to be the first biblically-noted bad real estate decision and settles in Sodom. The Torah has more to say on that later.

There is a lot more to this portion including Abraham marrying his wife's maidservant and the birth of Ishmael who an angel of Hashem says will be a

wild donkey of a man. Sarah gives birth to Isaac at the age of 90, Abraham is promised to be the father of nations, the first circumcisions are performed and there is a war between kings of various cities from around Canaan that eventually ends with Abraham having to intervene to save Lot. Suffice it to say, he was impressively victorious.

Often Shabbat messages end with a comparison between the acts from the bible and our actions as activists for JFNA. I'm not going to do that for this portion. Some of the actions, if emulated today, could lead to divorce and personal ruin. Others are so grand, they would be difficult to conceive. Instead, I just stand in awe of our ancestors, history, and Hashem's intervention on our behalf.

May we all so clearly see the path Hashem has set out for us, and follow it as faithfully as Abraham.

Shabbat Shalom,

Jason