

Parashah Summary: *Lekh Lekha*

Edited by Rabbi Shana

Torah Reading: p. 69 Haftarah: p. 94

G*d calls Abram to leave the land of his origin, and promises him a life of blessing and greatness. Famine drives Abram, his wife Sarai and nephew Lot to travel to Egypt. Sarai is taken into Pharaoh's harem after identifying herself (at Abram's insistence) as his sister, so as not to be killed by the Egyptians. Abram benefits materially from this deception, although G*d afflicts Pharaoh and his household with plagues. Dismayed, Pharaoh returns Sarai, and, along with Lot, they return to Beth El. Lot and Abram separate, with Lot settling in Sodom. In a war pitting four kings against five others, Lot is taken captive. Abram takes an armed force to rescue his nephew, and upon his victory and Lot's safe return, Abram refuses any spoils of war.

Abram is told that his descendants will first be slaves in a foreign land for four hundred years, and only then will they return and inhabit the lands of the Canaanites. Despite those promises, Sarai is still childless. She designates her handmaiden, the Egyptian Hagar, as her surrogate, who is impregnated by Abram. Conflict arises between Sarai and Hagar, and the girl flees. She returns to the family after an extraordinary encounter in the wilderness with a Divine Being.

Hagar's son Ishmael is born when Abram is 86. Thirteen years later, G*d renews the Covenant by giving the names Abraham and Sarah to our ancestors, signifying their elevated stature. "Brit Milah – the Covenant of Circumcision" is commanded for all Abraham's male descendants as well as his servants. When G*d assures him of the birth of a second son through Sarah, the elderly Abraham laughs at the notion of his 90 year old wife finally getting pregnant. He is told the child will be named Isaac, meaning laughter, and will serve as the genuine heir to the covenant. Abraham expresses concern about his firstborn, saying, "Would that Ishmael might live joyfully in Thy sight!" but G*d reassures Abraham, "He shall be the father of 12 chieftains, and I will make of him a great nation."

אהתעורר



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"Hagar Leaves the House of Abraham"

Peter Paul Reubens (1577-1640)

Sarai's maidservant, Hagar, is pregnant with Abram's child at the behest and with the stated hopes of her mistress. But sometimes, what we think we desire most turns out to be a bitter pill to swallow. Although the Torah says explicitly that, once pregnant, Hagar's treatment of Sarai was less than admirable, the domestic disruption escalates to the point that Sarai's treatment of Hagar forces Hagar to flee. She has an extraordinary encounter with a Divine Being in the wilderness, and returns to Abram and Sarai to face her destiny. Reubens' 17th century painting shows the power imbalance in this early, painful episode, setting the stage for so much of the conflicted history that will follow.