



Sermon Tidbits

OCTOBER 7, 2013

Parashat Lech Lecha

The New Negev

And Abram travelled...to the south (Genesis 12:9)

ויסע אברם...הנגבה (בראשית יב:ט)

Why is the southern region of Israel called the Negev? Ibn Ezra (on12:9) explains that in Aramaic the region is called *negivo maya*, meaning “dry [without] water.” Because the south is hot, the increased heat creates desert. Why did Abram travel there? Kli Yakkar (on 12:9) suggests that perhaps Abram was searching for wisdom and spirituality, but notes that “he was not seeking wealth.” Indeed, the Sages of the Talmud (Temurah 16a) called the Negev a “house dried from all goodness.”

For ages, the Negev was known and named for its vast area of dry and barren desert. Today, we’re witnessing the budding of the first fruits of Israel’s hard work to build the Negev into a region of growth, development and vitality.

Covering more than half of Israel’s territory, the dry, dusty Negev is now in the process of transformation, as Israel looks to utilize the space and resources the territory offers. Israel has committed to moving much of its military infrastructure to the Negev, and [will build](#) a giant training and technology base in the region. The natural sunshine in the region has spurred the development of Israel’s internationally renowned solar research and development industry. According to [Israel21c](#), a number of family wineries have been built in the Negev along the path of the old wine and spice routes in the Negev Desert highlands, resurrecting ancient grape-growing terraces from a forgotten civilization. All of this growth is finally gaining notice outside of Israel. [The New York Jewish Week](#) notes that last year, the well-known Lonely Planet travel guide “placed Israel’s Negev desert second on its list of the world’s top 10 regional travel destinations for 2013,” describing it as “a giant greenhouse of development. Think eco-villages, spa resorts and even wineries.” According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), “Negev and Galilee Development Minister Silvan Shalom said that, ‘In recent years, the Negev has undergone a revolution, is drawing strong populations and is developing in all aspects of life.’” For more on Israel today, click [here](#).

Since the times of Abram, the Negev represented dry, barren desert, devoid of blessing. Despite its arid makeup, Israeli initiatives are transforming the Negev into a land of exciting opportunity. ■

Knowing Who to Trust

Please say you are my sister (Genesis 12:13)

אמרי נא אחותי את (בראשית יב:יג)

Abram asked his beautiful wife Sarai to pose as his sister telling her that if the Egyptians learned that he was married to her, they would surely kill him. Dr. Gabriel Cohen of Bar Ilan University explains Abram recognized the moral deficiency in the Egyptian people later on when Abimelech, the Philistine king, asked him again why he pretended that his wife was his sister. Abram explained: “Surely the fear of God is not in this place.” (20:11) Dr. Cohen explains that Abram realized that his life was in danger in Egypt when he recognized that the people of Egypt “fail to follow basic principles of human ethical behavior.”

Just as Abram refused to trust the unethical ancient Egyptians, so too the international community must refuse to trust an Iranian regime that similarly acts unethically as it supports terror and murder around the world.

Iranian President Hassan Rohani's recent charm offensive during his visit to the United Nations in September was aimed at convincing the international community to pare down the crippling economic sanctions against his country in exchange for the [vague promise](#) of "arriv[ing] at a framework to manage our differences." Yet, despite his pleasant demeanor and calming rhetoric, in his speech to the U.N., Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu [listed](#) some of the many reasons why the world cannot trust Iran's leaders. "Iran directly participates in Assad's murder and massacre of tens of thousands of innocent men, women and children in Syria...In the last three years alone, Iran has ordered, planned or perpetrated terrorist attacks in 25 cities in 5 continents...Iran is actively destabilizing Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain and many other Middle Eastern countries." Iran finances, arms and trains terrorist groups operating around the world, and is the world's leading state sponsor of terror. Through its proxy armies of Hezbollah in southern Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, the Iranian regime is supporting terrorists that have carried out attacks on American troops and Israeli civilians. With its history of terrorism, murder and radicalism, Iran has clearly demonstrated a refusal to adhere to basic principles of ethical, moral behavior. Instead of reducing sanctions, the United States keep the pressure on Iran to halt its nuclear weapons program once and for all. For more on Iran, visit www.aipar.org/Iran.

Just as Abram could not trust the Egyptians because they failed to follow basic principles of ethical behavior, the world cannot trust an Iranian regime that has long supported terrorism and murder across the globe. ■

The Tactic of Abduction

And they took Lot (Genesis 14:12)

ויקחו את לוט (בראשית יד:יב)

After the four kings ultimately vanquished the five kings and overran the city of Sodom (see chapter 14:1-10), "they took Lot...the nephew of Abram" (14:12). Why did they specifically capture Lot? Sforno (on 14:12) explains that they hoped to use Lot in order to extort money from Abram. "They initiated the incarceration of Lot because he was the nephew of Abram and they knew of his wealth, and they expected that Abram would redeem him at great expense." Yet, Abram ultimately freed Lot by attacking and defeating the kings on his own.

During Abram's time our adversaries used kidnapping as a tool of extortion. Israel continues to contend with repeated attempts to kidnap soldiers for the purpose of harming the Jewish state.

According to the [IDF](#), early this year a routine patrol along the Gaza border thwarted a potential kidnapping attempt when soldiers "discovered the exit of a tunnel dug from the Gaza Strip" with an exit in Israeli territory. The tunnel was large enough to carry people, and indicates a serious attempt by terrorist groups, led by Hamas, to attack Israeli civilians and soldiers." Over Sukkot, Nidal Amar, a 42-year-old Palestinian resident of Beit Amin, kidnapped and killed twenty-year-old IDF soldier Tomer Hazan. According to [The Times of Israel](#), "The Shin Bet said Amar confessed to intending to trade Hazan's body for the release of another brother, a member of the Fatah Tanzim terror group, who has been serving time in an Israeli jail since 2003 for his role in several terror attacks, including planning a suicide bombing by a female bomber that was thwarted." In June, [Haaretz](#) reported that "the Israel Defense Forces has counted 27 attempted or planned abductions of soldiers, mainly by terrorist cells" from the beginning of the year, representing "a significant increase in attempts to abduct soldiers."

Just as the kings kidnapped Lot in order to extort money from Abram, Palestinian terrorists continue to attempt to use the same tactic of abducting Israeli soldiers in order to extort Israel to release terrorists from prison. ■