רמב"ן · אור החיים

Ramban & Or HaChayim

ראשון FIRST ALIYAH

12:1 *The LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.*

RAMBAN

AND THE ETERNAL SAID UNTO ABRAHAM 'LECH LECHA' (GET THEE OUT). This means, "For your own benefit and for your own good. And there I will make of you a great nation whilst here you will not merit the privilege of having children." Thus the language of Rashi. Now there is no need for it for such is the normal expression of the Hebrew language as in the verses: The rain is over and gone 'lo'; I will get 'li' unto the great men; Rise up, and get 'lachem' over the brook Zered; and many similar examples. Our Rabbis, however, have made a Midrash — (a homiletical interpretation) — concerning the verses [addressed to Moses] which state, And thou shalt make 'lecha' an ark of wood, and Make 'lecha' two trumpets of silver, since it was not his work and it would have been proper for these verses to be stated in the same way as that concerning the tabernacle, i.e., And thou shalt make the tabernacle.

OUT OF THY COUNTRY, AND FROM THY BIRTHPLACE. Rashi wrote, "But had he not already departed from there together with his father and reached as far as Haran? But thus, in effect, did the Holy One, blessed be He, say to him, 'Go still further away from thy father's house.'" And Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra explained the verse as follows: "And G-d had already said to Abram, 'Get thee out of thy country,' since this command came to him when he was still in Ur of the Chaldees, and there He commanded him to leave his country, his birthplace and his father's house, in which he was." But this is not correct, for if so, it would follow that Abram was the central figure in the journey from his father's house by command of G-d, while Terah his father voluntarily went with him. Yet Scripture says, And Terah took Abram his son, which teaches us that Abram followed his father and that it was by his counsel that Abram went forth from Ur of the Chaldees to go to the land of Canaan! Furthermore, [according to Ibn Ezra, who says that the above command came to Abram when he was still in Ur of the Chaldees], the verse stating, And I took your father Abraham from beyond the river and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, should have stated, "And I took your father from Ur of the Chaldees and led him throughout all the land of Canaan," for it was from there that he was taken, and it was there that he was given this command. In addition, the following difficulty may be put to Rashi and Ibn Ezra: when Abraham commanded Eliezer to get a wife for his son, he said to him, 'But thou shalt go unto my country and to my birthplace,' and he went to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. If so, that is his "country" and his "birthplace!" And there, Scripture further says [when Eliezer recounts Abraham's charge to him], But thou shalt go unto my father's house and to my family, thus clearly indicating that there (in Mesopotamia) were his father's house and his family which is "his kindred." This is not as Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra erred in interpreting, "Unto my country, Haran; and to my birthplace, Ur of the Chaldees." Now since Ibn Ezra says here that in Ur of the Chaldees it was said to Abraham, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, Abraham would thus have many countries! But the essential principle you already know from what we have written in the preceding Seder, namely, that Haran is Abraham's country, and there is his birthplace, it having always been his father's country, and there Abraham was commanded to leave them. In Bereshith Rabbah, the Rabbis similarly say "Lech lecha: one departure from Aram-naharaim, and one from Aram-nahor." The reason for mentioning out of thy country, and from thy birthplace, and from thy father's house is that it is difficult for a person to leave the country wherein he dwells, where he has his friends and companions. This is true all the more if this be his native land, and all the more if his whole family is there. Hence it became necessary to say to Abraham that he leave all for the sake of his love of the Holy One, blessed be He. UNTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW THEE. He wandered and went about from nation to nation, from kingdom to another people, until he came to the land of Canaan, where He said to him, Unto thy seed will I give this land. Then the promise, Unto the land that I will show thee, was fulfilled, and Abraham tarried and settled there. The verse which states, And they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, means that he was not heading for Canaan for the purpose of settling there since he did not as yet know that he had been commanded concerning this land. Rather, the righteous one set his goal towards the land of Canaan for that was his intention as well as that of his father when they originally set forth from Ur of the Chaldees. This is the reason why Abraham later said, And it came to pass, when G-d caused me to wander from my father's house: he was indeed gone astray like a lost sheep. It is possible to say that Abraham knew from the first that the land of Canaan was "the inheritance of the Eternal," destined that His special Providence be bestowed upon it, and he believed that the Divine promise, Unto the land that I will show thee, alluded to the land of Canaan either in its entirety or to one of all those lands [which together comprise Canaan]. He set his direction towards the land of Canaan generally for [he was certain that] there was the land which He would indeed show him.

UNTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW THEE. He wandered and went about from nation to nation, from kingdom to another people, until he came to the land of Canaan, where He said to him, Unto thy seed will I give this land. Then the promise, Unto the land that I will show thee, was fulfilled, and Abraham tarried and settled there. The verse which states, And they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, means that he was not heading for Canaan for the purpose of settling there since he did not as yet know that he had been commanded concerning this land. Rather, the righteous one set his goal towards the land of Canaan for that was his intention as well as that of his father

when they originally set forth from Ur of the Chaldees. This is the reason why Abraham later said, And it came to pass, when G-d caused me to wander from my father's house: he was indeed gone astray like a lost sheep. It is possible to say that Abraham knew from the first that the land of Canaan was "the inheritance of the Eternal," destined that His special Providence be bestowed upon it, and he believed that the Divine promise, Unto the land that I will show thee, alluded to the land of Canaan either in its entirety or to one of all those lands [which together comprise Canaan]. He set his direction towards the land of Canaan generally for [he was certain that] there was the land which He would indeed show him.

OR HACHAIM

G'd said to Abram, etc. There are two reasons for the most unusual phenomenon of G'd speaking to Abraham without having first appeared to him in some kind of vision. 1) Abraham's constant endeavour to get to know his Creator, something no one had ever done before him. According to our tradition Abraham already recognised his Creator at the age of five without having received any guidance from a teacher. G'd therefore did not have to prove His existence to Abraham by appearing to him in a vision. He could take it for granted that Abraham was aware of who was speaking to him.

2) During the ten generations since Noach that preceded Abraham not a single human being had recognised his G'd so that G'd had found him worthy to speak to. G'd therefore decided to test Abraham before speaking to him. He did this by demanding of Abraham that he leave his home, etc. Only after he had successfully passed that test did G'd decide to reveal Himself to Abraham in a vision as we find in 12,7. G'd did not relate in this manner to later generations because those generations had already absorbed a measure of faith in G'd through the example of their patriarch Abraham. They were born into an environment of some sanctity, an advantage not enjoyed by Abraham. As a result, G'd was able to commence His communications with such people by granting them a vision before He spoke to them. In Psalms 45,11 the Psalmist refers to Abraham's experience when he says: "Take heed, lass, and note, incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house." Our sages declared that the first half of that verse שמעי, listen, applied to our patriarch Abraham, i.e. when G'd spoke to him in 12,1. The second half of the verse where the Psalmist speaks about ראי, i.e. a visual experience, refers to 12,7 when G'd is reported to have appeared to Abraham in a vision. The sound and the vision did not occur simultaneously. To signify this the Psalmist did not say שמעי וראי בת, but placed the word בת in the middle. The best proof for the correctness of our view is the comparison with Moses' experience at the burning bush (Exodus 3,2-4) when a visual phenomenon preceded G'd speaking to him.

Go forth for yourself from your country. Why did G'd tell Abraham to leave his birthplace after He had already told him to leave his country? Surely, leaving one's country includes leaving one's birthplace?

The Torah lists the departures according to the pain of leave-taking involved. It is less painful to leave one's country than to leave one's birthplace, and it is even more painful to leave one's family. Abraham is commanded to leave in an ascending order of the nostalgia involved. He complied with the most difficult part of the test by leaving his parental home. The manner in which the Torah describes the process indicates that Abraham received an additional reward for each stage. We have a similar description of the gradually increasing difficulty of complying with G'd's command when G'd told Abraham to take: "your son, your only one, the one you love," as an introduction to the עקדה in Genesis 21,2.

It is also possible that whereas Abraham's departure from Ur Casdim had included a migration of his whole family, now G'd demanded that he leave his family behind. Abraham did not understand this correctly; this is why he took Lot with him. Alternatively, Abraham did understand that he was not supposed to take Lot with him, but the latter was so attached to him that he insisted on coming along on his own. When the Torah says in 12,5 that he did "take" Lot with him, the meaning is merely that he did not push him away until he found a suitable pretext as he did not want to shame his nephew. As soon as Abraham found a minor pretext to separate from Lot, such as when the shepherds of Lot and those of Abraham began to feud, he used that incident as an excuse to separate from Lot (13,8). It sounds quite uncharacteristic for Abraham, the model of making people welcome in his environment, to push someone away with both hands by saying: "if you want to go to the right, I will move to the left; if you want to move to the left, I will move to the right." The fact that G'd had not communicated with Abraham for a while until immediately after he separated from Lot (13,14), indicates that G'd had been waiting for the moment when Lot would finally separate from him. Only then did G'd show Abraham the extent of the land that would eventually belong to his descendants. G'd delayed fulfilling the last part of the promise contained in our verse until Abraham had rid himself of Lot.

An additional meaning of the instruction to Abraham to "go for yourself," is not so much that he was to be alone but that he was to benefit spiritually by this migration. Although man's success in this world does not depend on the amount of effort he invests in his material progress as we know from Psalms 75,7: "for what lifts a man comes not from the east or the west or the wilderness of hills;" our sages say that every time the word הרים, mountains appears in the Bible it means mountains except in this instance. In Psalms 75,7 the word describes a spiritual uplift. This comment of our sages notwithstanding, the fact that a change of one's physical environment brings in its wake an improvement in one's fortune is not to be ignored. This was why G'd commanded Abraham specifically to leave his country. Our sages (Chulin 95) say that there are three things, which do not actually constitute forbidden superstition even if one does pay attention to them. However, such attention borders on superstition. They are: בית, תינוק, ואשה. [If the enterprise one undertakes after building himself a house, after a baby is born to one, or after one has married, turns out well, it may be taken as a good omen. If not, it may be a sign that one should not persevere with that particular endeavour. Rabbi Eleazar adds that one should not be influenced by such failure unless it occurred three times in succession. Ed.] Baba Metzia 75 also said that if one experiences bad luck in one place without moving to another place one has oneself to blame if one's fortunes do not improve.

and from your birthplace. The lesson here is that living in a place endangered by lions is preferable to living in a place surrounded by sinners, though the latter appeared secure.

to the land which I will show you. G'd did not tell Abraham if he was meant to set out on his journey immediately or if he should wait till He would specify the exact location He wanted

Abraham to move to. This ambiguity was part of the test to which G'd subjected Abraham. G'd also hinted that He would show Abraham the whole of the land of Israel by broadening his field of vision, etc, as we know from 13,14: "lift your eyes from where you are and look northward, southward, eastward, and westward."

G'd also hinted that Abraham should move to ארץ ישראל, a land suitable for the Presence of G'd to become manifest, and for people who are worthy to experience such a manifestation. The Sifri on Numbers 35,34 states that (full) manifestation of G'd's presence depends on the Jewish people being in the land of Israel. Accordingly, the meaning of the word אראך is both: "I will show it (the land) to you," and: "I will show you to it (the land)." One will not achieve its full potential without the other.

12:2 *I will make of you a great nation, And I will bless you; I will make your name great, And you shall be a blessing.*

RAMBAN

AND BE THOU A BLESSING. You will be the blessing by whom people will be blessed, saying, "G-d make thee as Abraham." To this He added that all families of the earth will cite him in blessing, not just the people of his country alone. It may be that the expression, And in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed, means that they will all be blessed on his account. Now this portion of Scripture is not completely elucidated. What reason was there that the Holy One, blessed be He, should say to Abraham, "Leave your country, and I will do you good in a completely unprecedented measure," without first stating that Abraham worshipped G-d or that he was a righteous man, [and] perfect? Or it should state as a reason for his leaving the country that the very journey to another land constituted an act of seeking the nearness of G-d. The custom of Scripture is to state, "Walk before Me, and hearken to My voice, and I will do good unto you," as is the case with David and Solomon, as well as throughout the Torah: If ye walk in My statute; And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Eternal thy G-d. And in the case of Isaac, it says, For My servant Abraham's sake. But there is no reason for G-d to promise [Abraham a reward merely] for his leaving the country. However, the reason [for G-d's promising Abraham this reward] is that the people of Ur of the Chaldees did him much evil on account of his belief in the Holy One, blessed be He, and he fled from them to go to the land of Canaan, tarrying for a time at Haran, whereupon the Eternal told him to leave these places as well and to fulfill his original intention that his worship be dedicated to Him alone and that he call upon people [for the worhip of] the Name of the Eternal in the Chosen Land. There He would make his name great, and these nations would bless themselves by him, not as they treated him in Ur of the Chaldees, where they abused and cursed him, put him in prison or in the fiery furnace. He further told Abraham that He will bless those who bless him, and if some individual will curse him, he will be cursed in turn. This then is the meaning of this portion of Scripture. The Torah, however, did not want to deal at length with the opinions of idol worshippers and explain the matter between him and the Chaldeans in the subject of faith, just as it dealt briefly with the matter of the generation of Enosh and their thesis concerning the idol-worship which they instituted.

OR HACHAIM

I shall make a great nation out of you. Since G'd had given Abraham a threefold commandment, He now promised that fulfilment of these three steps would result in three benefits to Abraham. 1) The promise that Abraham would become a great nation was the reward for leaving his country. 2) The promise to bless Abraham and make him a great name was a reward for his leaving his birthplace. 3) The promise that Abraham himself would become a source of blessing was a reward for his leaving his father's home. These three promises were compensations for things people normally enjoy when they are in familiar surroundings. 1) They have many friends and acquaintances. 2) They enjoy a degree of honour and respect within their family. 3) Inasmuch as they are part of a family their economic needs are taken care of should they fall on hard times. When a person emigrates to a totally strange country, he knows that he gives up the mental and economic stability that he took for granted in his home.

12:3 *I will bless those who bless you And curse him that curses you; And all the families of the earth Shall bless themselves by you."*

OR HACHAIM

I shall bless those who bless you. This additional blessing was to compensate Abraham for G'd's failure to tell him the destination he was headed for. After all, G'd did not even tell Abraham which country to head for! It was a tremendous test for Abraham to just leave his home, etc., without having the slightest idea where he was to make his new home. The fact that Abraham did not query G'd in his mind or by prayer is considered as extremely praiseworthy. As a result of this blind faith in G'd, Abraham encountered success wherever he went. His spiritual stature grew constantly.

We are entitled to ask why the wording of the Torah is different in respect to those who bless Abraham from that to those who curse him. In the former case G'd mentions that He will bless such people even before they have actually blessed Abraham. In the case of people who curse Abraham, G'd is not described as cursing such people until after they have actually cursed him. If G'd were to curse the potential curser prior to his cursing Abraham, that person would never become aware of the reason G'd cursed him. On the other hand, G'd does not cause any harm by blessing those who intended to bless Abraham already in anticipation of their good deed.

It is also noteworthy that the Torah speaks about the people who will bless Abraham in the plural, whereas the reference to anyone who might curse Abraham is phrased in the singular.

Perhaps this is best explained in connection with what the rabbis said to the son of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai in Moed Katan 9. They wished him: תזרע ולא תחצד, "may you sow and not harvest," and a few more such strange sounding wishes. The Talmud describes how Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai explained to his son that though these wishes sounded like curses they were actually blessings. The reference to sowing and not harvesting was a blessing i.e. that he should father children but not have to bury them. It is not the actual phraseology that matters but the intent. G'd told Abraham that there are some people who clothe their curses in words that sound like blessings. He told him that He would also bless the individual who blessed Abraham in such an unusual manner as did the rabbis who blessed the son of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. The word מקללך applies both

to what preceded it and to what follows it. Accordingly there are two kinds of people who might curse Abraham; the ones who dress up the curse to sound like a blessing, and the ones who curse outright. The first category is alluded to when you read the word ומקללך as if it belonged to the word מברכיך which preceded it. The other kind of curser is the one who curses without provocation and without hypocrisy. When the Torah says of G'd אאר, this refers to both categories of people cursing Abraham.

An alternate way of explaining this is based on the statement in Taanit 20: "better the curse of an Achiyah Hashiloni (a prophet, compare Kings I 14,15) than the blessing conferred upon the Jewish people by Bileam." The former used words of a curse to give the Jewish people an incentive to overcome the curse, the latter praised them excessively, hoping to lull them into a kind of spiritual nirvana that would make them easy prey for the evil urge. Concerning the person who bestows the kind of Achiyah Hashiloni's curse on Abraham, G'd says that He will bless a person who curses with such good intentions, whereas concerning the one who does the reverse, G'd will curse him though he couched his curse in words which seemed to convey a blessing.

and all the families of the world will receive a blessing thanks to you. This is the difference between people who bless you and those that are indifferent to you, neither blessing Abraham not cursing him. G'd will bless directly anyone who blesses Abraham; the ones who do not bless Abraham will receive only an indirect blessing, i.e. via Abraham.

12:4 *Abram went forth as the* LORD *had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.*

OR HACHAIM

Abram went, etc. In view of verse 5 which describes Abraham's journey in detail, this entire verse seems superfluous.

The Torah wants to show Abraham's love for G'd. He set out immediately without waiting for G'd to elaborate on His original instructions. The letter כ at the beginning of the word כאשר, describes the time, i.e. how Abraham acted immediately G'd finished speaking to him, how he left his father and his birthplace without further ado. The Torah adds that though Lot was so closely attached to Abraham that he insisted on accompanying Abraham, he did not do so for the same reason, i.e. a divine command. Abraham had tried to leave Lot behind in an elegant way but had not succeeded. [Had Lot joined Abraham as a religious gesture, the Torah would have described this by writing עמו instead of אתו. Ed.]

The Torah writes the verse for yet another reason. Inasmuch as G'd had promised Abraham a number of rewards if he would fulfil His command, the average reader might assume that Abraham was primarily motivated by the promises G'd had made to him. The Torah wants us to know that the reason Abraham left his home and his father was because G'd had said so to him, not because of any secondary considerations such as the promise of becoming a man of great prominence. The Torah chose the words כאשר דבר, as G'd had told him firmly, not כאשר אמר, which would have corresponded to the opening statement of our פרשה where it said: ויאמר השם. When G'd uses the word דבר, this always implies that it is not easy to comply with G'd's command; when G'd uses the word אמר the implication is that it is relatively easy to comply.

Another message we are to derive from this verse is that though Abraham did not yet know which country G'd wanted him to go to, he had already set out without using the excuse of waiting for further instructions before leaving his home. In verse 5 the Torah lists all those who accompanied Abraham to show that the test did not consist of who went with him but it consisted of Abraham not knowing where he was supposed to head for.

12:6 *Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land.*

RAMBAN

AND ABRAM PASSED THROUGH THE LAND. I will tell you a principle by which you will understand all the coming portions of Scripture concerning Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is indeed a great matter which our Rabbis mentioned briefly, saying: "Whatever has happened to the patriarchs is a sign to the children." It is for this reason that the verses narrate at great length the account of the journeys of the patriarchs, the digging of the wells, and other events. Now someone may consider them unnecessary and of no useful purpose, but in truth they all serve as a lesson for the future: when an event happens to any one of the three patriarchs, that which is decreed to happen to his children can be understood. Concerning all decisions of "the guardians [angels]," know that when they proceed from a potential decree to a symbolic act, the decree will in any case be effected. It is for this reason that the prophets often perform some act in conjunction with the prophecies, just as Jeremiah commanded Baruch his disciple, And it shall be, when thou hast made an end of reading this book, that thou shalt bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates, and thou shalt say: Thus shall Babylon sink. Likewise is the matter of Elisha when he put his arm on the bow [held by Joash, King of Israel]: And Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The Eternal's arrow of victory, even the arrow of victory against Aram. And it is further stated there, And the man of G-d was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldst have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Aram till thou hadst consumed it whereas now thou shalt smite Aram but thrice. It is for this reason that the Holy One, blessed be He, caused Abraham to take possession of the Land and symbolically did to him all that was destined to happen in the future to his children. Understand this principle. Now, with the help of G-d, I will begin to explain in detail the subject matter of the verses. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Shechem. This is the city of Shechem for such was the name of this place, and Shechem the son of Hamor was called by the name of his city. Now Rashi wrote, "He entered it unto the place of Shechem in order to pray on behalf of Jacob's sons when they would come grieved from the field." This is correct. And I add that Abraham took possession of this place at the very beginning, even before the land was given to him. It was thus hinted to him that his children would first conquer this place before they would merit it and before the guilt of the dwellers of the land was full to warrant their exile therefrom. It is for this reason that the verse here states, And the Canaanite was then in the land. And when the Holy One, blessed be He, gave him the land by His Word, Abraham journeyed from there and

pitched his tent between Beth-el and Ai for this was the place that Joshua captured first. It is possible that Scripture mentions, And the Canaanite was then in the land, to teach us concerning the substance of this chapter, i.e., to state that Abram came into the land of Canaan, but G-d did not show him the land He had promised him. He passed to the place of Shechem while the Canaanite, that bitter and impetuous nation, was yet in the land, and Abram feared him. Therefore he did not build an altar to G-d. But when he came to the vicinity of Shechem at the oak of Moreh, G-d appeared to him and gave him the land, and as a result his fear departed from him for he was already assured in the land that I will show thee, and then he built an altar to G-d in order to worship Him openly. Now eilon Moreh (the oak of Moreh) is in the vicinity of Shechem and is also called eilonei Moreh, as it is written over against Gilgal, beside 'eilonei Moreh.' There in Shechem, near the Jordan, are Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, where the Israelites arrived at the beginning of their entrance into the land. Eilonei Mamre, however, is a place in the land of Hebron, far from the Jordan. Know that wherever Scripture states, eilonei Mamre, the name Mamre is on account of an Amorite by that name to whom the place belonged, just as it says, And he dwelt at the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshkol and brother of Aner, and wherever it says, eilon moreh or eilonei moreh, the places were so called on account of a man by the name of Moreh, but he was a Canaanite from the land of the Canaanites, who abide in the plains. When Scripture mentions Mamre alone, it means the name of a city, just as it is said: And Jacob came unto Isaac his father unto Mamre, the city of Arba, which is Hebron; Before Mamre which is Hebron. The man to whom the oaks belonged was called after the name of the city. A similar case is that of Shechem the son of Hamor, who was called Shechem after the name of the city Shechem. In Bereshith Rabbah it is said, "In the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah, Mamre is the name of a place, and in the opinion of Rabbi Nechemyah, it is the name of a person."

OR HACHAIM

Abram traversed the land. The Torah informs us that Abraham kept moving from one location to another without any of the local inhabitants challenging him. This in spite of the fact that the Canaanites ruled in the land at the time.

The verse also hints that Abraham behaved like an itinerant traveller, not pretending to be a man of stature. This characteristic of Abraham came to the fore later when others refer to him as אברם העברי, Abram the transient. The reason that the Torah mentions the presence of the Caaanite in the land only in this verse, and not in verse 5 where we would have expected it, is to indicate exactly when the land of Israel passed into the hands of the Canaanites (having previously belonged to the descendants of Shem). The fact that the expression ארצה כנען is used already in verse 5 means only that the Torah refers to the name the country would be known by subsequently.

Possibly the word כנען which has a numerical value of 190 is an allusion to Abraham and Sarah being 100 and 90 years old respectively when Isaac was born. The idea that this land would eventually be transferred to the Israelites therefore is already part of its very name. The latter became potential owners once Isaac was born.

Another lesson from the mention of the Canaanite "then being in the land," is that the Torah reminds us that Canaan was a slave, having been cursed by Noach who decreed that he should be עבד עבדים, "a slave to slaves (Genesis 9,25)." Slaves do not possess property rights. The Canaanite taking over the land from the Semites eventually opened the way for the Israelites to dispossess, them. The Semites, who had come by the land legally, would have presented G'd with a legal problem He had to solve before He could have disposessed them. Our sages have said that inasmuch as Abraham was a Semite, expelling the Canaanites and having the Israelites take over the land was only a return of the land to its rightful owners. Accordingly, the Torah phrases its description of the Canaanite presence in the land in such a way that the world understands that such a presence was never legal (compare Rashi and Nedarim 32).

Another reason the Torah mentions the presence of the Canaanites as conquerors in the land is to contrast this with G'd's promise to give the land to Abraham's descendants. Had the Torah not informed us of the fact that the descendants of Shem already lost most or all of the land to the Canaanites, we would not have considered G'd's promise as something special, seeing that Abraham was a descendant of Shem and as such already had a legal claim on that country.

12:7 *The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will assign this land to your offspring." And he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.*

RAMBAN

The sense of the expression, And there he built an altar unto the Eternal, who appeared unto him, is that he gave praise to the Glorious Name and offered unto Him a sacrifice of thanksgiving for His having appeared to him. Until now G-d had not appeared to him neither in a mar'eh nor in a machzeh. Rather, the command, Get thee out of thy country, was said to him in a nocturnal dream or through Ruach Hakodesh. It is possible that the expression, Who appeared unto him, alludes to the mystery of the sacrifice. The one enlightened [in the mysteries of the Torah] will understand.

OR HACHAIM

G'd appeared to Abram. The Torah wishes to compliment Abraham on his great love for his Creator. G'd appeared to Abraham and promised him not only children but that his descendants would inherit the land he was on. Abraham considered the mere fact that G'd appeared to him as sufficient reason to build an altar for G'd. The feeling that G'd had deemed him worthy to appear to him was so overpowering that Abraham considered the promise of children and of the land as secondary. This is why the Torah stresses that he built the altar "to the G'd who appeared to him." This is what David said in Psalms 16,11: "In Your presence is perfect joy." Perhaps we find an echo of these sentiments when Ben Azzai declined to marry, saying that he was so in love with Torah that he could not do justice to the demands made upon him by marriage (Yevamot 63).

12:8 *From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and he built there an altar to the LORD and invoked the LORD by name.*

RAMBAN

AND HE CALLED UPON THE NAME OF THE ETERNAL. Onkelos explained it as meaning that he prayed there, just as in the verse, I called upon Thy name, O Eternal, out of the lowest dungeon. The correct interpretation is that Abraham loudly

proclaimed the name of the Eternal there before the altar, informing people of Him and of His Divine essence. In Ur of the Chaldees he taught people but they refused to listen. Now, however, that he had come to the land concerning which he had been promised, And I will bless them that bless thee, he became accustomed to teach and to proclaim the Deity. Scripture likewise tells of Isaac — when he went to the valley of Gerar where he was promised, Fear not, for I am with thee — that he built an altar there and invoked the name of the Eternal since he had come to a new place where they had not heard of His fame or seen His glory, and he proclaimed His glory among these nations. Now a similar statement is not made concerning Jacob, [i.e., that he proclaimed the name of the Eternal before the peoples of the land of Canaan], for since he begot many children — all of whom were worshippers of G-d — and he had a great community, which was called "the congregation of Israel," it was through them that the Faith was proclaimed and became known to all people. Besides, the Faith had been proclaimed throughout the entire land of Canaan since the days of his ancestors. In Bereshith Rabbah the Rabbis similarly say, "And he called upon the name of the Eternal. This teaches us that he caused the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, to be in the mouth of all people."

OR HACHAIM

He moved on from there to the hills. Seeing that the word ויעתק is transitive, the object seems to be missing in this verse. Rashi says that the object is Abraham's tent. This seems inadequate. Perhaps we have an allusion here that Abraham moved a rock [simile for G'd] from the place where G'd had appeared to him. This would correspond to something the sages said in Berachot 5 about the verse in Job 18,4: "Will earth's order be disrupted for your sake? Will a Rock be dislodged from His place?" The lesson here would be that whenever Israel moves from a place it has offered prayers to G'd, G'd moves with Israel. This concept was introduced by Abraham and Israel draws on Abraham's merit to this day in this respect.

The message in this verse may also be that whenever Abraham put up his tent henceforth, he first dismantled the altar he had built and rebuilt it at the site he would erect his tent.

12:9 *Then Abram journeyed by stages toward the Negeb.*

RAMBAN

TOWARDS THE SOUTH. Rabbeinu Shlomo [Rashi] wrote, "To go to the southern part of the land of Israel, which is in the territory of the sons of Judah who took their portion in the south of the land of Israel." This was also to happen to Abraham's offspring in the future, as it is said, Judah shall go up first.

12:10 *There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.*

RAMBAN

AND THERE WAS A FAMINE IN THE LAND. Now Abraham went down to Egypt on account of the famine to dwell there in order to keep himself alive in the days of the drought, but the Egyptians oppressed him for no reason [and attempted] to take his wife. The Holy One, blessed be He, avenged their cause with great plagues, and brought him forth from there with cattle, with silver, and with gold, and Pharaoh even commanded his men to escort them from the land. He thereby alluded to Abraham that his children would go down to Egypt on account of the famine to dwell there in the land, and the Egyptians would do them evil and take the women from them, just as Pharaoh said, And every daughter ye shall save alive, but the Holy One, blessed be He, would avenge their cause with great plagues until He would bring them forth with silver and gold, sheep and oxen, very rich in cattle, with the Egyptians pressuring to send them out of the land. Nothing was lacking in all the events that happened to the patriarch that would not occur to the children. The Rabbis have explained this subject in Bereshith Rabbah: "Rabbi Pinchas said in the name of Rabbi Oshaya that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham, 'Go forth and tread out a path for your children!' Thus you find that whatever is written concerning Abraham is also written concerning his children. In connection with Abraham it is written, And there was a famine in the land; in connection with Israel, it is written For these two years hath the famine been in the land." Know that Abraham our father unintentionally committed a great sin by bringing his righteous wife to a stumbling-block of sin on account of his fear for his life. He should have trusted that G-d would save him and his wife and all his belongings for G-d surely has the power to help and to save. His leaving the Land, concerning which he had been commanded from the beginning, on account of the famine, was also a sin he committed, for in famine G-d would redeem him from death. It was because of this deed that the exile in the land of Egypt at the hand of Pharaoh was decreed for his children. In the place of justice, there is wickedness and sin.

12:11 *As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are.*

RAMBAN

BEHOLD NOW, I KNOW, ETC. 13. SAY, I PRAY, THOU ART MY SISTER. I do not know why Abraham was more fearful for her now than before. And if we say, as Rashi explains, that it was because the Egyptians were black and repulsive, now, to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, he also said so, he as well as Isaac, who lived in that land by command of G-d. Perhaps the Canaanites in that generation were steeped in idolatry but restrained from unchastity more than the Egyptians and the Philistines. But this is not correct. It is possible that Abraham and Sarah had no fear until they came into a royal city for it was their custom to bring the king a very beautiful woman and to slay her husband through some charge they would contrive against him. It appears to me correct that such was their procedure from the time they left Haran. At every place he would say, "She is my sister," for so Abraham said, And it came to pass, when G-d caused me to wander from my father's house, etc. Scripture, however, mentions it only concerning those places where something happened to them on account of it. Thus Abraham now alerted Sarah as he had charged her from the beginning. Isaac, on the other hand, was not afraid in his country and in his city. Only when he came to the land of the Philistines did he adopt his father's way. He [Abraham] said, That it may be well with me for thy sake, and that my soul live because of thee, meaning "as long as we are strangers in this land, until the famine will pass," for Abraham came to live in the land of Egypt on account of the famine. When the famine passes, he would return to the land concerning which he had been commanded and which G-d had given to him and his children. He thus thought that they [he and his wife] would live through the famine and that relief and succor will come to them from G-d en-

abling them to return, or that it may be possible for them to flee to the land of Canaan when they will give them up. Now Rashi wrote, " 'Hinei na' (Behold now), I know. A Midrash Agada: Until now he had not perceived her beauty on account of her modesty. Now, however, [he became cognizant of it] through an event. Another interpretation is that because of the exertion of travelling a person usually becomes uncomely, but she [Sarah] has retained her beauty. Still the plain sense of the text is this: 'Behold, now the time has come to be anxious because of your beauty. I have long known that you are a woman of beautiful appearance, but now we are travelling among black people, brethren of the Ethiopians, who have never been accustomed to see a beautiful woman.' A similar example [where the Hebrew word na does not denote a request, as it usually does, but means "now"] is found in the verse, Behold 'na' (now), my lords, turn aside, I pray you." All this is the language of the Rabbi [Rashi]. This Midrash concerning the modesty between Abraham and Sarah is traditional and it has been adjoined to the verse, but there is no need for all these matters. The word na [hinei na — behold now] does not indicate only a newly arisen matter; it may be used with reference to anything which is presently in existence for it is a statement alluding to the present state of things. Behold now I know — from then until now — that thou art a woman of beautiful appearance. Of similar meaning is the verse, Behold 'na' (now), the Eternal hath restrained me from having children, meaning from my youth until this day. Likewise is the verse, Behold 'na' (now), I have two daughters, for they were not born to him now. All [verses containing this expression] are to be interpreted in like manner. It would seem from the simple meaning of the verses that Sarah did not obligate herself to say so, [i.e., that she is Abraham's sister], but when the Egyptians, who were wicked and sinners exceedingly, saw her and they praised her to Pharaoh, she was taken to his house. They did not ask them at all whether she is his wife or his sister, and she remained silent and did not tell them that she is his wife. It was Abraham himself who told them that she is his sister, and therefore they did well by him for her sake. This is the intent of the verse quoting Pharaoh, which says, What is this that thou hadst done unto me? Why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? He [Pharaoh] accused him for when he saw the princes of Pharaoh taking her, he should have told Pharaoh that she is his wife. Again, he accused him for saying afterwards to the princes and the household of Pharaoh that she is his sister. But he did not at all accuse the woman for it is not proper that she contradict her husband, the suitable thing being for her to remain silent.

OR HACHAIM

It happened as he came closer to Egypt, etc. Our sages (Baba Batra 16) use this verse to demonstrate how chaste Abraham was, that he had not even seen Sarah's beauty up until now. We need to understand why Abraham spoke to Sarah about her beauty.

If it was merely because he planned to have her describe him as her brother instead of as her husband, this would not diminish the danger they found themselves in. Sarah would be in danger of being killed if she resisted rape, or else would have to submit voluntarily to someone who fancied her. Abraham wanted to forestall Sarah's argument that he should never have brought her to Egypt in the first place and have endangered them both. While it is true that righteous people have to place their trust in G'd, this rule applies when one does not deliberately place oneself in a dangerous situation. No one has the right to make his survival depend on a miracle. We know this from the prophet Samuel who took along an animal to sacrifice when he set out to anoint David as king. He did this even though G'd Himself told him to go on that mission. When he remonstrated with G'd that the mission could be fatal for him if Saul would hear about it, G'd Himself told Samuel to camouflage it (Samuel I 16,1-5). Abraham therefore told Sarah that had he but known earlier how beautiful she was he would indeed not have undertaken such a dangerous journey. He would have taken her elsewhere. Now that they had already come close to Egypt he had found out more about the Egyptians' lack of sexual mores and the fact that they had ugly faces (or were black-skinned). He therefore had reason to fear for his life if he were to be known as Sarah's husband. He examined Sarah's beauty critically in order to understand the degree of danger that this could pose for him. Abraham did not describe Sarah as merely יפת מראה; he described her as אשה יפת מראה. There is a subtle difference here. He realised that her beauty was unique. Her beauty was bound to arouse the carnal instincts of the Egyptians.

We must not question how Abraham could take a chance and take Sarah to the land of the Philistines after his experience in Egypt. Whereas the Egyptians had ugly faces, this did not apply to the Philistines. Sarah's beauty therefore did not represent such a contrast to what the Philistines were used to. This is why Abraham never ordered Sarah herself to say that he was her brother. He contented himself with describing Sarah as his sister (20,2).

12:12 *If the Egyptians see you, and think, 'She is his wife,' they will kill me and let you live.*

OR HACHAIM

It will be that as soon as the Egyptians will set eyes on you, etc. Abraham explained the reason he was going to engage in deception before he asked Sarah to lie. He wanted Sarah to speak about her brother Abraham not merely in response to questions about their status. He wanted her to make it plain even before they entered the land of Egypt that they were travelling together as brother and sister. In the event that Sarah would object to telling lies when none had as yet been called for, he told her that if they merely awaited developments it would be too late. The Egyptians would automatically assume that Abraham was Sarah's husband and they would get rid of him. They would not even bother to ask about her status.

12:13 *Please say that you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may remain alive thanks to you."*

OR HACHAIM

In order that I will receive benefit on your account. Abraham explained why he asked Sarah to describe him as her brother and not as some more distant relative or a total stranger. If Abraham's status were anything less than Sarah's brother the Egyptians would not have any interest in securing his goodwill. Abraham may have had yet another motivation for insisting that Sarah describe their relationship to each other instead of he himself. His own words would not convince the Egyptians as they might construe them as a stratagem to be wooed with gifts. The plain reason is no doubt that he was afraid that if he were to say he was her brother and she would say nothing, sooner or later Sarah might make a comment which would reveal that there was a husband-wife relationship between her

and Abraham. When Abraham added that וחיתה נפשי, that his soul would remain alive due to the stratagem of Sarah describing him as her brother, he did not have in mind his mere physical survival. If that had been his intention he would have said ואחיה, "so that I will survive." The word וחיתה נפשי is an allusion to Sarah's remaining spiritually uncontaminated. We have a tradition (Proverbs 13,25) that צדיק אוכל לשובע נפשו, that the reason a righteous person consumes physical food is not to indulge his senses but to satisfy the needs of his soul to carry on his task in life. Abraham was motivated by similar considerations.

The reason Abraham appears to repeat himself when he said 1) בעבורך, and 2) בגללך, is that he hoped he would exprience physical wellbeing as well as spiritual wellbeing due to Sarah's describing herself as his sister. Our sages (Berachot 31) explain Samuel I 1,11 אם ראה תראה בעני אמתך, to mean that if ראה, G'd would see Channah (pay attention to her prayer) and would grant her a child, all well and good; if not תראה, she would place herself in a compromising situation which would force her husband to treat her as a סוטה, a woman suspected of marital infidelity. Once she would drink the waters prescribed for such a woman (Numbers 5,24) her innocence would be established and G'd would have to grant her a child as per verse 28 in that chapter. Abraham hoped that as a result of Sarah's chastity under circumstances resembling the compromising situation a סוטה finds herself in, he and she would have a child thus assuring Abraham of his future, וחיתה נפשי, "my soul will live on." There are numerous instances where our sages have explained the word בגלל as having metaphysical significance, such as in Deuteronomy 15,10 where G'd promises that blessings will devolve upon people already if they merely promise to do charity, דבר (Tossephta Peah 4). The letter ו in וחיתה also has a special significance. Abraham did not mean that the fact that his soul would remain alive would be part of the benefit he would experience through Sarah's lie. Whereas the survival of his body would be an extension of ייטב לי, the direct benefit he would derive from Sarah's lie, the spiritual dimension, i.e. the survival of his soul would be an independent benefit, something that he would achieve later on when Sarah would be alone in the palace of Avimelech, the king of the Philistines. On that occasion he did not face expulsion from the land of the Philistines on account of having been found out as a liar (20,15). It is even possible that the fact that Sarah twice found herself in the position of a סוטה, a woman unjustly suspected of marital infidelity, once in the palace of Pharaoh, and then again in the palace of Avimelech, resulted in her ability to conceive and bear a child. Rabbi Yitzchok, (a teacher of Rashi?) suggests that when the Torah appears to repeat itself in Numbers 5,28, i.e. "if the woman has not become defiled and has remained pure," this refers to her neither having been unfaithful with the man with whom she is suspected to have been unfaithful now, nor with any other man. In such a case she will be unharmed by the waters she has drunk and able to retain seed. Accordingly, Sarah became pregnant and bore Isaac to prove that she had been faithful to her husband each time she found herself in the situation of a סוטה. The expression חיתה נפשי would refer to Abraham having children due to the chaste conduct of Sarah.

שני SECOND ALIYAH

12:15 *Pharaoh's courtiers saw her and praised her to Pharaoh, and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's palace.*

RAMBAN

AND THE PRINCES OF PHARAOH SAW HER. The purport thereof is that when the Egyptians saw her they said, "This one is worthy of the great princes," and so they brought her before them. But they were also afraid of touching her for due to her great beauty, they knew that the king would desire her exceedingly. "And they praised her among themselves saying, 'This one is worthy of the king.'" Thus the language of Rashi. This is in accordance with the opinion of Onkelos who says, "And they praised her for Pharaoh." Or it may be that they praised her to the king himself, and he sent for her and took her.

12:17 *But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his household with mighty plagues on account of Sarai, the wife of Abram.*

RAMBAN

BECAUSE OF SARAI ABRAM's WIFE. This means that because of the wrong done to Sarah, as well as to Abraham, and the merit of both of them, these great plagues came upon Pharaoh and his house.

OR HACHAIM

G'd brought plagues on Pharaoh. The word וינגע is related to נגע, touched. When Pharaoh was about to touch Sarah, G'd revealed to him that she was married to Abraham.

12:18 *Pharaoh sent for Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me! Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?*

RAMBAN

AND PHARAOH CALLED ABRAM. It is possible that when the plagues suddenly came upon him and his house at the very time Sarah was taken to his house, he thought to himself, What is this that G-d hath done unto us? And so he asked her, and she told him that she is Abraham's wife. For this reason he called Abraham and accused him. Or it may be, as our Rabbis say, that Pharaoh was smitten with a certain skin disease which is aggravated by intimacy with a woman. Therefore he suspected that perhaps she is Abraham's wife, and so he said to him with uncertainty, What is this that thou hast done unto me?, in order to draw the truth from him. Were she his sister, he would say, "Indeed, she is my sister." And Pharaoh further said to him, Now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way. He said this in order to see what he would say, and now he would answer his reproof. But Abraham remained silent and did not answer him a word out of his great fear. Then Pharaoh understood that she is his wife as he had suspected, and then Pharaoh commanded his men to send him away.

OR HACHAIM

Pharaoh called in Abram. Why does the Torah quote Pharaoh as saying למה, why, twice in succession? Perhaps he wanted to give expressions to two levels of his astonishment at Abraham's conduct. First he accused Abraham of entrapping him by withholding the information that Sarah was married, a fact which could cause Pharaoh to commit a sin. Secondly, Pharaoh could

not understand that Abraham had not only withheld relevant information but had deliberately misinformed him when he described Sarah as his sister.

One reason why Pharaoh and Avimelech reacted differently to Abraham's deception may have to do with the ugliness of the Egyptians. Pharaoh expelled Abraham (12,20), whereas Avimelech put the whole country at his disposal (20,15). Pharaoh could not be sure that some other member of his people would not rape Sarah even after he had released her since Sarah's beauty was in such contrast to that of his own people and his people were steeped in sexual permissiveness. Avimelech had no such concerns. This is why he asked Abraham: "what did you see, etc?" He meant "why did you have reason to be worried?" Pharaoh understood very well that Abraham would never feel safe once the people knew Sarah was his wife. He had to be given safe conduct out of the country. The Torah tells us of the hypocrisy of Pharaoh by adding his second question. Pharaoh was entitled to the first question. He could claim that Abraham should have told him at least privately that Sarah was his wife. He claimed to have been insulted by Abraham's lie since he would have provided Abraham with security once he knew that he was Sarah's husband. Abraham had made it plain by his lie that he even suspected Pharaoh himself of being unable to restrain his lust. He wanted Abraham to believe that either a) he would have provided him with a security escort, or b) he would have sent him out of the country immediately. We might well ask why every husband who comes to a foreign country has to identify his entourage and point out to the king who is his wife.

Pharaoh asked why Abraham told a lie though normally there had not been a need for him to say anything regarding this woman. Nonetheless Sarah's extraordinary beauty should have prompted him to come forward and tell the truth in order to ensure his and her safety. The moment Abraham misrepresented the facts, he only had himself to blame if Pharaoh decided to take Sarah for himself. Abraham could not answer Pharaoh without insulting him further by telling him that he placed no trust in his assurances, that he thought Pharaoh perfectly capable of doing what he did even had he known that Sarah was married to him. Pharaoh may well have got the hint; this may be why he hastened to expel Abraham and entourage from Egypt.

12:19 *Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her as my wife? Now, here is your wife; take her and begone!"*

RAMBAN

SO THAT I TOOK HER TO BE MY WIFE. The meaning thereof is that it was Pharaoh's intention that she be his regal wife, not just his concubine. Pharaoh mentioned this to Abraham so that he should confess to him if she is his sister, as I have explained.

13:1 *From Egypt, Abram went up into the Negeb, with his wife and all that he possessed, together with Lot.*

RAMBAN

HE, AND HIS WIFE, AND ALL THAT HE HAD. The purport thereof is to let us know that they did not rob him of any of all the great gifts they gave him on account of Sarah who was to be for the king. They did not say, "You have tricked us, and the gift was given by mistake." This was a miraculous event.

שלישי THIRD ALIYAH

13:7 *And there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and those of Lot's cattle.—The Canaanites and Perizzites were then dwelling in the land.—*

RAMBAN

AND THERE WAS A QUARREL. Rashi wrote, "Because Lot's shepherds grazed their cattle in other people's fields, Abram's shepherds rebuked them for this act of robbery, but they replied, 'The land has been given to Abram, and he has no [son as an] heir, and so Lot will be his heir. Hence this is not robbery.' Scripture however states, And the Canaanite and the Perrizite abode then in the land, so that Abram was not yet the legitimate owner." This is a Midrash of our Rabbis. But I wonder: The gift of the Land declared to Abram was for his children, as it is said above, Unto thy seed will I give this land, so how can Lot inherit it? Perhaps the shepherds heard of the gift and they mistook its meaning, for Scripture states that in the meantime, the land belonged neither to Abram nor to Lot. Accordingly, the verse stating at the outset, for their possessions were great, intended to say that because of their extensive possessions, the land could not support them, and Lot's shepherds therefore found it necessary to bring their cattle into fields that had owners. This was the cause of the quarrel. By way of the plain meaning of Scripture the quarrel concerned the pasture as the land could not support them both. When Abram's cattle were grazing in the pasture, Lot's shepherds would come into their territory and graze their cattle there. Now Abram and Lot were both strangers and sojourners in the land. Abram, therefore, feared that the Canaanite and the Perrizite, who inhabit the land, might hear of the abundance of their cattle, [whose great number was made apparent when Lot's shepherds encroached on Abram's land, thereby combining the flocks], and drive them out of the land or slay them by sword and take their cattle and wealth since the mastery of the land belonged to them, not to Abram. This is the purport of the verse, And the Canaanite and the Perrizite. Scripture thus mentioned that there were many peoples dwelling in that land, they and their cattle being innumerable, and the land could not support them and Abram and Lot. From the word oz (then) — [And the Canaanite and the Perrizite abode 'then' in the land] — it appears to me that the nations dwelling in the land at that time were those who live in tents and have cattle, some of them converging on one district and grazing there for a year or two and then journeying from there to another district in which they had not previously pastured. And so they continued to do, as is customary among "the children of the east." The Canaanite and the Perrizite were thus "then" in the land of the south, and in the following years the Jebusite and the Amorite would come there.

13:8 *Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, between my herdsmen and yours, for we are kinsmen.*

OR HACHAIM

Let no quarrel develop between me and you. Abraham told Lot that what had started as an argument between their respective shepherds was bound to lead to a quarrel between the two of them even though Lot claimed that he would never allow this to happen. After all, he respected his uncle too highly as the senior member of the family. The substance of the shep-

herds' arguments concerned the fact that Lot allowed his shepherds to graze on privately owned land, counting on G'd's promise that the land would belong to Abraham's family in the future. Seeing that Abraham had no children and was genetically unable to father children, Lot viewed himself as Abraham's heir. Abraham alluded to this by the superfluous comment that they were brothers.

Another reason Abraham referred to their being brothers may be understood in light of our sages' comment on Psalms 50,20 [I have not found that commentary. Ed.]. The Psalmist describes a brother who lives with another brother as maligning him. Applied to our context this means that Abraham was afraid that if the local inhabitants would take Lot to court for stealing from them, his own reputation as the elder brother (uncle) would become tarnished. He could not allow this to happen.

Abraham may also have hinted to Lot that the very fact that their principals were brothers made Lot's shepherds take that relationship for granted. Familiarity breeds contempt; had the two not been related, Lot's shepherds would have given Abraham the respect due him as an elder and as a person whom G'd had obviously favoured.

13:10 *Lot looked about him and saw how well watered was the whole plain of the Jordan, all of it—this was before the* LORD *had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—all the way to Zoar, like the garden of the* LORD*, like the land of Egypt.*

RAMBAN

AS THE GARDEN OF THE ETERNAL, LIKE THE LAND OF EGYPT. The verse states that the whole land of the Plain was adequately irrigated from the Jordan by working with the foot, just as was done with the garden of G-d, concerning which it is stated, And a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and as is the way in the land of Egypt, concerning which it is stated, And thou didst water it with thy foot. The verse mentions both places: it says that the land of the Plain was as adequately irrigated as the garden of the Eternal, which is the most perfect place on this earth, and it also mentions, like the land of Egypt, a place well known for pasture. Our Rabbis have said, "As the garden of the Eternal for trees; Like the land of Egypt — for herbs." Their intent was to explain that there were large rivers in the Plain, which watered the trees of the gardens, as was the case in the garden of G-d, and that there were also ponds in it, as in the land of Egypt, from which vegetable gardens were watered. Lot chose this part, for a land which is so irrigated is unlikely to suffer from a drought and is good for pasture.

13:12 *Abram remained in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the Plain, pitching his tents near Sodom.*

RAMBAN

ABRAM DWELT IN THE LAND OF CANAAN. The meaning thereof is that he dwelt in the remainder of the entire land of Canaan; he did not stay in one place but abode in the entire land of Canaan while Lot settled in one place thereof, namely, the cities of the Plain, for the cities of the Plain are part of the land of Canaan. The meaning of [the plural "cities" in the expression, and Lot dwelt in] the cities of the Plain, is that he dwelt for a time in this city and a time in the other on account of his many cattle. This is the reason that the verse says, So Lot chose him all the plain of the Jordan; he made a condition with Abram that he [Abram] should not come into the entire Plain.

13:13 *Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners against the* LORD*.*

RAMBAN

NOW THE MEN OF SODOM WERE WICKED AND SINNERS. The purport thereof, as Rashi wrote, is that Scripture accuses Lot for not restraining himself from dwelling with them and also speaks of the merit of the righteous one [Abraham] whose lot did not fall in a place of wickedness for the rod of wickedness shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous. And all the cities of the Plain were wicked and sinners against the Eternal exceedingly. This was why they alone were overthrown even though all the Canaanites were people of great abominations, for so it is written.

13:14 *And the* LORD *said to Abram, after Lot had parted from him, "Raise your eyes and look out from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west,*

OR HACHAIM

G'd said to Abram. The form of address is unusual. We would have expected ויאמר השם "now G'd said to Abraham, etc." The reason for the form of address chosen by the Torah maybe that the Torah wanted to give us a hint that G'd had already waited a long time to tell Abraham what He now told him, but that as long as the wicked Lot was part of his entourage He could not do so. G'd now fulfilled the second part of what He had said to Abraham in 12,1 i.e. אל הארץ אשר אראך.

and look from the place, etc. G'd had to emphasise the word מן המקום to alert us to the miracle that He expanded Abraham's sense of vision so that he could see the entire land of Israel from the place he stood on. He did not even have to turn around to look in the different directions.

13:15 *for I give all the land that you see to you and your offspring forever.*

OR HACHAIM

For the entire land, etc. We are all familiar with the limitations of our eyesight. We can see for a certain distance, no more. We are also familiar with the so-called קפיצת הדרך, telescoping a distance of earth under one into a very small distance such as was experienced by Eliezer on his way to Charan, and Jacob on his way to Charan. In this instance G'd brought the various borders of the land of Israel closer to Abraham so that he could see them all with his normal eyesight. Abraham took possession of the land symbolically because all of it was within his view. Normally speaking, there is no more absolute sign of possession than to move a rock from its location. Here G'd moved the entire land from its location to bring it within the sight of Abraham's eyes.

13:17 *Up, walk about the land, through its length and its breadth, for I give it to you."*

RAMBAN

ARISE, WALK THROUGH THE LAND IN THE LENGTH AND IN THE BREADTH OF IT. It is possible that this is a matter of option, depending on his will. The Eternal thus told Abraham, "Go wherever you wish to go in the land for I will be with you and guard you from the evil of the nations, for unto thee will I give it, that is to say, the land will be yours." And if it be a

command that Abraham should traverse the length and breadth of the land in order to take possession of his gift, as I have explained, he was not commanded to do this immediately. He did so ultimately for he was now in the east, and afterwards he went to the land of the Philistines which is in the west, and thus he fulfilled the command during his lifetime. The meaning of the expression, to thee... and to thy children, is that you are to take possession of the gift now, in order to transmit it to your children, even as our Rabbis have said: "The land of Israel is an inheritance to the people of Israel from their patriarchs." By way of the plain meaning of Scripture, it is possible that the meaning of the verse is that Abraham was to be a ruler over the land and a prince of G-d in its midst, wherever he will go in this land.

OR HACHAIM

Arise, and walk through the land. The Talmud Baba Batra 100 discusses how one acquires title to land. [The context of the discussion is whether the fact that people used someone's private property as a shortcut entitles them to continue to do so even if the property in question changed hands. Ed.] Rabbi Eliezer, basing himself on our verse, claims that merely traversing the land assures one of one's rights to the area one has traversed; the other rabbis hold that one has to go through the regular legal procedure for acquiring title. The rabbis say that our verse is not to be taken as a general rule, but that an exception was made in the case of Abraham who was especially beloved of G'd. G'd intended to facilitate Abraham's descendants taking possession of the land when the time came. According to these rabbis, Abraham's title to the land stems from verse 15 where G'd had promised it to Abraham. The reason G'd rolled the land up so as to bring it close to Abraham was in order that the act of moving it would demonstrate ownership by the person on whose behalf it was moved.

רביעי FOURTH ALIYAH

14:1 *Now, when King Amraphel of Shinar, King Arioch of Ellasar, King Chedorlaomer of Elam, and King Tidal of Goiim*

RAMBAN

AND IT CAME TO PASS IN THE DAYS OF AMRAPHEL KING OF SHINAR. This event happened to Abraham in order to teach us that four kingdoms will arise to rule the world. In the end, his [Abraham's] children will prevail over them, and they will all fall into their hands. Then they will return all their captives and their wealth. The first one mentioned here is the king of Babylon for so it was to be in the future, as it is written, Thou art the head of gold. Perhaps Ellasar, mentioned here second, is the name of a city in Media or Persia, and Elam, mentioned third, is the city in which the first Greek king — Alexander — was crowned. From there his kingdom spread after he was victorious over Darius, [king of the Persians]. Our Rabbis have already mentioned this matter: "Rabbi Yosei said, 'For six years the Greeks ruled in Elam, and after that their kingdom spread over the entire world.'" The king of Goiim, [the last of the four kings mentioned here], who ruled over various nations that had made him their head and leader, is an allusion to the king of Rome who ruled over a city comprised of many peoples: Kittim, Edom, and the rest of the nations. Thus the Rabbis said in Bereshith Rabbah, "Rabbi Avin said, 'Just as Abraham's grief began with four kingdoms, so will it end for his descendants only with four kingdoms.'" And it further says there: "And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar — this is Babylon; Arioch king of Ellasar — this is Media; Chedorlaomer king of Elam — this is Greece; And Tidal king of Goiim — this is that kingdom (Rome) which writes out a levy [and collects assessment] from all nations of the world."

OR HACHAIM

It was during the reign of Amrafel, etc. The reason the Torah introduces this chapter here is to show that these four kingdoms were the super-powers during that period. Once we have been informed of the exploits of these kings, Abraham's victory when he rescued Lot can be seen in its proper perspective.

14:2 *made war on King Bera of Sodom, King Birsha of Gomorrah, King Shinab of Admah, King Shemeber of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar,*

RAMBAN

AND THE KING OF BELA. The reason [why Scripture does not mention his name as it does with the kings of Sodom, et al], is that he ruled over a small city with few men in it and he had no generally recognized reputation.

14:6 *and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as El-paran, which is by the wilderness.*

RAMBAN

'EIL PARAN.' It is translated in the Targum as "Plain of Paran." But I say that the word eil does not signify a plain. Rather, the lowland of Paran was called Eil, that of Mamre was named Eilonei, that of the Jordan was called Kikar, and that of Shittim was Abel. All these are translated in the Targum as meishra (plain), but each really had its own particular name. Thus the language of Rashi. But if it were so, Onkelos would have mentioned them in his Targum by their name — i.e., "Eila of Paran," "Eilonei of Mamre," — as is his custom with names. Besides, who told him whether these many places were all plains or high mountains [if Eil, Eilonei and Kikar were but proper names of these places]? Again, Mamre is the name of a person — as it is written, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner, and they were confederate with Abram — and that place was his, just as it says, 'Eilonei' Mamre the Amorite, as I have explained. Rather, Eil paran means a place of terebinths, as it is said, For they shall be ashamed 'me'eilim' (of the terebinths) which ye have desired; eilonei is a place of oaks, as it is said, As a terebinth, 'veka'alon' (and as an oak) Of the 'alonim' (oaks) of Bashan. It was customary among them that these terebinths and oaks be planted in the plains before the cities which serve them as "an open land." And so did Onkelos translate alon bachuth as "the plain of Bechuta." There the word alon is surely not a proper noun of the location but only the name of the species of tree planted there, as is made explicit [in the same verse: and she was buried] ...under the 'alon.' Onkelos' intent, however, is to convey the sense of the expression and not to merely translate the words. Now the Targum Yerushalmi says with respect to both eil Paran and eilonei Mamre that they mean the plain of Paran and Mamre as Onkelos said, but in the case of alon bachuth, he [Targum Yerushalmi] says it is the nut-tree of Bachut for he considers alon bachuth to be the name of a tree and not a place. Onkelos, however, thought that alon bachuth is the name of a place, so called because there were many oak trees there, just as Eilonei Mamre [is the name of a place]. It is for that reason that Scripture there uses the word ha'alon. Thus

according to Onkelos they are all descriptive nouns. But kikar hayarden is indeed the actual word for a plain, for kikar in the Sacred Language is the name for the place where the natural streams of rivers overflow. It is for this reason that the messenger who came to rescue Lot said, Stay not in all 'hakikar' (the plain; escape to the mountain. Of similar usage are the expressions, Kar nirchav (wide pasture); 'Karim' (the meadows) are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn. Sometimes Scripture doubles the first letter of the word kar (meadow), making it kikar, and at other times Scripture discards the double form, as in, bath ayin (the apple of the eye). There are many other such cases. Swift couriers are also called by this name kar, as in 'lakari velaratzim;' The captains over hundreds and 'hakari.' The word bakirkaroth is also of the same root. It is the name for speedy camels such as "the flying camel" mentioned in the Talmud. The word mecharkar, containing the double use of kar, is a derivative of this word. Abel Hashittim, and also Abel Mecholah, they translated to mean the plain of Shittim and Mecholah. It is [called Abel, which in Hebrew means "mourning"], because it is a desolate place, without plantings or structures for the word abel is, to them, an expression of destruction and waste, as in the verses: 'Vaya'avel' (And He made to mourn) the rampart and the wall; The new wine 'aval' (faileth), the vine fadeth.

14:7 *On their way back they came to En-mishpat, which is Kadesh, and subdued all the territory of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who dwelt in Hazazon-tamar.*

RAMBAN

TO EIN MISHPAT, WHICH IS KADESH. It is named [Ein Mishpat, meaning, "the Well of Judgment"] on account of a future event, for Moses and Aaron will be judged because of what will occur at that fountain. Thus the words of Rashi based upon an Agadah. But I do not understand this for this Kadesh [mentioned here] is Kadesh-barnea which is in El-paran which is by the desert, and it is from there that the spies were sent by Moses in the second year following the Exodus from Egypt, as it is said, Unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh. And it is further written, And we came to Kadesh-barnea... and ye said, Let us send men before us, and there Israel abode many days. But the Kadesh where the judgment of the righteous ones took place is in the wilderness of Zin, which they entered in the fortieth year following the Exodus, as it is said, And the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people abode in Kadesh, and finish the chapter. Perhaps the Midrash [mentioned above] alludes only to the name, meaning that a place bearing this name Kadesh will become "the Well of Judgment." Now Onkelos said, "the plain of pilug dina," but I do not know what this means. Perhaps the word pilug is derived from [the Hebrew word used in the following verses]: 'Plagim' (Streams) and watercourses; Who 'pilag' (hath cleft) a channel for the waterflood. Similarly, in the language of the Sages we find, "Pilgo (The openness) of the sea." The verse thus states that on that plain there will flow "a fountain of judgment" entering the depth of the case, as this was a fitting plain destined for kings who would sit there to judge all the peoples of these lands.

THE COUNTRY OF THE AMALEKITES. Rashi comments: "Amalek, it is true, was not yet born, but it is so named here because of the name it would bear in the future." Now I do not know whether Rashi's intent is to say that Moshe Rabbeinu called the place by the name it was referred to in his time, but if this be the case, there is no reference to future events involved. Or [if Rashi's intent is that the nations of Abraham's era called it by that name] what is being foretold by the nations' prophetic naming of this place? But the language of Bereshith Rabbah is as follows: "Amalek was not yet born and yet you say, 'All the country of the Amalekites!' However, the Torah declares the end from the beginning." This method of d'rash of the Sages is found in many places. Concerning the rivers of the garden of Eden they also made a similar statement. The intent of the Rabbis is to say that from the time the rivers came forth it was already declared that a particular river go towards a land which is destined to be called Assyria. The correct interpretation concerning "the country of the Amalekites" mentioned here is that there was in ancient times some honorable person of the sons of the Horites, the inhabitants of the land, by the name of Amalek, who ruled over this place. Eliphaz, Esau's firstborn, named his son after this man. Perhaps this Amalek mentioned here was of the family of Timna, his mother, and he also ruled in that place and was chieftain over them.

14:10 *Now the Valley of Siddim was dotted with bitumen pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, in their flight, threw themselves into them, while the rest escaped to the hill country.*

RAMBAN

'BE'EROTH BE'EROTH CHEIMAR' (FULL OF SLIME PITS). There were many pits there since they removed earth to be used as clay for building purposes. The Midrashic explanation is that the clay was closely kneaded together in them, [that is, it was very sticky], but a miracle happened to the king of Sodom and he escaped from there. This miracle occurred because there were some among the nations who did not believe that Abram had been delivered from the fiery furnace, but as soon as this one escaped from the slime, in retrospect they believed in Abram. Thus the language of Rashi. There is no doubt that the meaning of be'eroth cheimar is "pits containing mud and slime," even as it is written, And in the pit there was no water, but mire, and Jeremiah sank in the mire, and it is further written, He brought me up out of the tumultuous pit, out of the miry clay. And it is possible that the king of Sodom went out from there naturally, without a miracle. And I wonder concerning the above Midrashic explanation, for those nations that did not believe that the Holy One, blessed be He, had performed a miracle for Abraham would not have their faith in the Holy One, blessed be He, augmented by witnessing the miracle which befell the king of Sodom. The king of Sodom was an idol worshipper, and his miracle would either strengthen the hands of the idol worshippers or it would cause them to believe that all miracles are done by witchcraft or are due to some remotely possible chance. His miracle would thus cast doubt into the hearts of those who believed in Abraham's miracle! Perhaps [the Rabbis who authored this Midrashic explanation] will interpret the verse, And the king of Sodom went out to meet him, as implying that "he went out" from the pit when Abraham passed by for it was in honor of Abraham that a miracle was done to him so that he could go forth to meet him in order to honor and bless Abraham. And it is possible that Abraham, upon his return, looked into that pit for he wanted to save the kings and return their wealth to them, and then the miracle happened on his account. Now if a miracle was done to the king of Sodom in honor of Abraham, the nations could now believe

all the more that a miracle would be done to Abraham himself in order to rescue him from death. We must further say that the king of Gomorrah had already died when Abraham passed him by or that he had fallen into another pit, as the word "there" refers to "the vale."

14:12 *They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, and his possessions, and departed; for he had settled in Sodom.*

OR HACHAIM

They took Lot, etc. The reason the Torah adds that Lot was Abraham's nephew and that he lived in Sodom, something we have known for a long time, is to tell us that these kings were very well aware of who Lot was. This did not deter them from taking Lot captive. The Torah stresses that these kings deliberately ignored the fact that they were provoking a man of international repute when they took his nephew into captivity. None of this would have happened to Lot had he not chosen to live in Sodom. The matter can be compared to Israel capturing a substantial part of Moab though G'd had forbidden Israel to provoke war with Moab or to attack it (Deut. 2,9). Once the Emorite king Sichon had defeated Moab in war, the lands captured by Sichon were no longer considered as Moabite territory, and Israel took possession of them. Here too, once Lot had chosen to throw in his lot with the Sodomites he was no longer considered as part of Abraham's entourage, and was not entitled to the protection Abraham could have afforded him. This also explains why Abraham did not try to secure Lot's release by peaceful means. He knew that the 4 kings knew very well whom they had taken prisoner. If Lot's relationship with Abraham had not stopped them, there was no point for Abraham to warn those kings before attacking them. Lot's capture was a hostile act against Abraham.

Should you argue that the four kings had merely reacted against the insubordination of the five kings associated with the king of Sodom, and that Lot was their legitimate booty, as per the comparison we have drawn with Sichon and the Moabites, this is not an accurate comparison after all. That comparison was valid when there existed neither a state of peace nor a state of war between two parties. Abraham and the four kings were at peace, and the four kings should have warned Lot to leave Sodom before making war just as did King Saul with the Kenites before he attacked the Amalekites (Samuel I 15,6).

14:15 *At night, he and his servants deployed against them and defeated them; and he pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.*

RAMBAN

AND HE DIVIDED HIMSELF, BY NIGHT. Rashi wrote: "In accordance with the plain sense of the verse it means [that they divided into groups] as is the manner of those who pursue their enemies when they flee in different directions. By night means that even after it became dark, they did not cease pursuing them." The correct interpretation is that he pursued the enemies to Dan during the daytime with his entire army. When it became dark and he was not able to see by which road they fled, he divided his people and servants into two or three groups, taking one part with him, and they pursued them on all roads, smiting them as far as Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. Then he returned from pursuing them. The order of the words [in the verse are thus interpreted as follows]: "And he divided himself, he and his servants, by night."

AND HE PURSUED THEM UNTO HOBAH, WHICH IS ON THE LEFT HAND OF DAMASCUS. It is known that there is a great distance from the oaks of Mamre in Hebron in the land of Judah, to Damascus, which is outside the Land. If so, he pursued them for many days until he forced them to leave the land for they were returning to Babylon, their country. Or possibly there occurred here a great miracle, just as our Rabbis expounded from the verse, The way with his foot he treadeth not.

14:16 *He brought back all the possessions; he also brought back his kinsman Lot and his possessions, and the women and the rest of the people.*

OR HACHAIM

and he also restored Lot and his possessions. Although the whole exercise was designed only to rescue Lot, the Torah first reports Abraham's spectacular military accomplishments and how he restored their property to the five kings. The reason Abraham restored the women and children to the kings of Sodom was in recognition of the fact that they had treated Lot with respect and honour.

14:18 *And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was a priest of God Most High.*

RAMBAN

AND MELCHIZEDEK KING OF SALEM. This is Jerusalem, just as it is said, In Salem is set His tabernacle. In the days of Joshua, its king was also called Adoni-zedek. Since time immemorial the nations knew that this place, which was the choicest of all places, is in the center of the inhabited region. Or perhaps they knew of its superiority by tradition, i.e., that it is exactly opposite the Heavenly Sanctuary, where the Divine Glory of the Holy One, blessed be He, who is called Tzedek (Righteousness) abides. In Bereshith Rabbah [we find that Jerusalem is called Tzedek because] "this place makes its inhabitants righteous. And Melchizedek means 'the lord of Zedek.' Jerusalem is called Tzedek, as it is said, 'Tzedek' (Righteousness) lodged in it."

AND HE WAS PRIEST OF G-D THE MOST HIGH. This is stated in order to inform us that Abraham would not give a tithe to the priest of other gods, but since he knew that he was a priest of G-d the Most High, he gave him the tithe as an honor to G-d. He alluded to Abraham through this episode that the House of G-d will be there, and there his descendants will bring the tithe and the Heave-offering, and there they will bless the Eternal. Now according to the opinion of our Rabbis who say that Melchizedek was Shem, the son of Noah, we must say that he left his country in the east and came to Jerusalem to worship the Eternal. He became the people's priest of G-d the Most High since he was the honored one among their father's brothers, as Jerusalem was ever in the boundary of the Canaanites. Now Rashi wrote above, "And the Canaanite was then in the land. They were gradually conquering the land of Israel from the descendants of Shem, the ancestor of Abraham, for it had fallen to the share of Shem when Noah apportioned the earth among his sons, as it is said, And Melchizedek king of Salem." This is not correct because the boundary of the Canaanite was from Sidon, which includes all of the land of Israel. The boundary of the children of Shem, on the other hand, was to the east of Mesha, far from the land of Israel. But if Noah apportioned the countries among his sons and gave Shem the land of Israel, it would be similar to the case of a person who apportions his goods by word of mouth. Meanwhile, the children of Canaan, [who were

the descendants of Ham], settled there until the time came when G-d caused the seed of His friend Abraham to inherit it, as I have already mentioned.

AND HE WAS PRIEST OF G-D THE MOST HIGH. Since there were, among all nations, priests serving the angels called eilim (the mighty ones) — even as it is said, Who is like unto Thee 'ba'eilim' (among the mighty) — the Holy One, blessed be He, is called G-d the Most High, the purport thereof being "the Mighty One, Who is Supreme over all," as in the verse, It is 'le'eil' (the power of) my hand. Now Melchizedek did not mention the Eternal, whereas Abraham said, the Eternal, G-d of the Most High.

OR HACHAIM

And Malki Tzedek the king of Salem, etc. Our sages (Midrash Aggadah) claim that Malki Tzedek was identical with Noach's son Shem. The reason that the Torah interrupts the report of Lot's rescue by reporting Malki Tzedek's arrival is to contrast his behaviour with that of the king of Sodom. Whereas Malki Tzedek came with gifts and a blessing though Abraham had done nothing for him, the king of Sodom came empty-handed although he owed Abraham a great debt of gratitude for having saved both his life and his kingdom. The Torah merely shows the difference between the behaviour of the wicked and that of the just.

Another way of looking at this episode is based on our sages who credited Abraham with not only observing the commandments which would later on be legislated in the Torah (Yuma 28), but even observing Rabbinic ordinances such as עירובי תבשילין. In view of Abraham's personal piety the king of Sodom was well aware that he would not eat food or drink wine presented to him by an idolator. In order to save himself such an embarassment the king chose Malki Tzedek to be the messenger who would present this gift to Abraham. [You will note that it does not say that Abraham partook of either bread or wine contrary to his custom when he prepared a meal for Avimelech, for instance. Ed.] According to all this the Torah teaches us here that Abraham would not even eat foods which are forbidden only by Rabbinic injunction.

The Torah also wants to teach us how it was that the king of Sodom offered the loot of the war (property previously owned by the four kings) to Abraham instead of demanding both the prisoners and the property. The king of Sodom had observed that Abraham tithed the loot to Malki Tzedek in the latter's capacity as G'd's priest. He understood that one does not tithe the matters which do not belong to one. Inasmuch as Abraham apparently considered the loot as his own, the king of Sodom did not give away anything when he made the apparently generous offer for Abraham to keep the loot.

and he was a priest of the Supreme G'd. The emphasis on the word הוא indicates that only he was a priest, not his descendants. The priesthood was conferred upon Abraham as we know from Psalms 110,4: אתה בהן לעולם, "You are a priest forever." The Psalmist refers to the blessing conferred upon Abraham by Malki Tzedek. I will still explain that Malki Tzedek conferred the priesthood upon Abraham willingly.

The words "of the Supreme G'd," are necessary as there were many priests of many deities. Our sages (Nedarim 32) claim that Malki Tzedek lost his priesthood because he blessed Abraham before he blessed G'd. Accordingly we would have to understand the words: "and he was a priest" to mean that his priesthood was something of the past. He forfeited it by slighting G'd. The fact that the Torah did not report the unfortunate wording of Malki Tzedek's blessing until after hinting that he had already forfeited the priesthood is irrelevant because the Torah was not written till after the event.

14:19 *He blessed him, saying, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.*

RAMBAN

KONEI (POSSESSOR) OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. Rashi wrote: "Konei is similar to osei (maker); through His having made them He acquired them as His possession." But these are really two different interpretations. Perhaps it is indeed the case that the word kinyan (acquisition) is also used in the case of asiyah (making). Thus you find, For Thou 'kanita' (hast made) my reins, repeating the thought [expressed in the second half of the verse], Thou hast knit me together in my mother's womb. A similar case is the verse, Is He not 'konecha' thy father? Hath He not made thee, and established thee? Thus the Sacred Language uses kinyan in the case of "making." Conversely, And the souls which 'asu' [literally, they made] in Haran, means "they acquired." And of that which was our father's 'asah' (hath he made) — [here too it means "hath he acquired."] That which Rashi says further — "He acquired them as His possession," is correct, for whatever belongs to a person is called kinyano (his acquisition). Sheep are called mikneh because they constitute the main wealth of a person. In the language of the Sages: "He who picks up a find for his friend, his friend kanah [has taken title to it];" "watching gives 'keniya' (the right of possession) in ownerless property;" "a man's yard koneh (obtains title) for him without his knowledge." Similarly, the Sages, in all places, use the expression of kinyan for taking possession, meaning that it is his. This was the intention of Onkelos when he translated konei (of heaven and earth) as d'kinyanei, [meaning "Whose possessions are heaven and earth"], and he did not say kanah (who acquired).

OR HACHAIM

He blessed him and said, etc. We need to understand whether the blessing which the Torah mentions here, i.e. ברוך אבדם, is the gist of the blessing. If that were so, why did the Torah have to introduce it with the words ויברכהו, "he blessed him?" I believe that the words ברוך אברם allude to an additional blessing. Were this not so, the expression ויברכהו should have been followed by the word לאמר.

We must understand the matter as follows. First Malki Tzedek bestowed a blessing on Abraham which pertained to his personal wellbeing such as that his enemies should not be able to harm him, etc. Next he blessed him wishing him spiritual development a blessing directed to G'd who should allow Abraham to be His true servant. By being successful as a servant of the Lord, G'd Himself would be perceived by man as the owner of not only the heavens but also of the earth. He wished him that through him his descendants would acquire eternal life so that heaven and earth would endure forever. Our sages (compare Zohar 1,89) have expressed all this when they said that but for Abraham, G'd would not really have a true possession in either heaven or earth.

Even the closing words of Malki Tzedeks' blessing, i.e. אשר מגן צריך בידך which ostensibly seems to be a blessing conferred by G'd on Abraham, are a blessing conferred upon G'd. G'd considers Himself blessed through the existence of a human being such as Abraham.

14:20 *And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your foes into your hand." And [Abram] gave him a tenth of everything.*

RAMBAN

AND HE GAVE HIM A TENTH OF ALL. Abraham did not wish to take for himself from a thread even to a sandal tie. But the part of the Most High he set aside in order to give it to the priest. Now the king of Sodom went out to meet Abraham at the vale of Shaveh in his honor, and he accompanied him to the city of Salem where Melchizedek brought out bread and wine for the people that followed him. The king of Sodom did not ask anything of Abraham, but when he saw his generosity and righteousness in giving the tithe to the priest, then he also asked for the souls by way of charity. Abraham, trusting that his G-d will give him riches, possessions and honor, did not wish to take anything from him, and so he returned all the wealth of Sodom which belonged to him, and all the wealth of Gomorrah for it to be returned to its owners. The king of Sodom had asked above all for the souls, but Abraham's consideration above all was that they should not say that they made Abram rich. Now the other places mentioned had been destroyed by the enemy in battle; only the wealth of Sodom and Gomorrah, among the cities of the five kings, fell into the hands of the enemy because since their kings were lost in the slime pits, their cities remained defenseless. It is possible that [the plunder from the other three cities is alluded to] in the words of Abraham: "If from a thread even to a sandal tie will remain with me of all the wealth that has come to me from all of you; and if I take anything that is thine of your wealth which you, the king of Sodom, gave me."

OR HACHAIM

And blessed the Supreme G'd, etc. As already mentioned our sages say that Malki Tzedek was punished for putting G'd second in his list of blessings. He lost his priesthood because of this error. We must try and understand what prompted Malki Tzedek to commit such an error. Perhaps he thought that inasmuch as Abraham had come to recognise G'd without parental or anyone else's guidance, he deserved to receive a blessing first and foremost. Afterwards he blessed the Lord who had found pleasure in a human being such as Abraham. Malki Tzedek may have wanted to teach us that G'd only truly enjoys human beings who have first made it their business to please Him. He expressed this thought by saying: "Blessed Abraham to the Supreme G'd because he made himself be fit to be a servant of the Lord. As a result he is blessed by the Supreme G'd who has committed your enemies into your hands." [according to this Malki Tzedek's error consisted in using chronology as a guideline for the order in which he formulated his blessing. Ed.] Despite the good intention of Malki Tzedek, this was an improper way of blessing. The servant never takes precedence over his Master.

חמישי FIFTH ALIYAH

14:21 *Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, and take the possessions for yourself."*

OR HACHAIM

Give me the persons and take the loot for yourself. We need to understand what was the point of the king of Sodom's offer for Abraham to "take" the loot, seeing that Abraham had possession of it. He himself had captured it, including all the people who had been kept prisoner. How could the king say on the one hand: "give me the persons," and "take yourself the loot," when Abraham possessed both at the time? What did the king offer? Was he not in fact merely asking for something instead of offering something? Why did he make it seem like a trade off?

Perhaps we can best understand all this in light of what the Talmud teaches in Baba Kama 116. A caravan of travellers is attacked by robbers. One of the travellers succeeds in saving the belongings of all the travellers; he is considered as having done so on behalf of all the travellers; each one picks up his original belongings. If the person who undertook the risk of saving all these belongings had declared that he risked his life only in order that the spoils should be his in the event that he would succeed, then he may keep all the chattels he has saved. Rav Ashi elaborates that this is so when the other travellers could have saved their chattels had they only tried hard enough. Rashi explains there that if none of the other travellers offered any comment when the one who set out to recover the goods announced that he would do so but on his own account, they are all considered as having renounced their hope of recovering their belongings. As a result they cannot reclaim their belongings. The king of Sodom did not consider himself as having abandoned hope of escaping his situation. He argued that had it not been for Abraham's intervention, he could have recovered his belongings himself.

As a result, the fact that Abraham had not intervened with the intention of sharing the spoils with the prisoners had no legal basis. After all, the king of Sodom had not overheard Abraham's declaration that he acted on his own behalf. How could he therefore be accused of having remained silent at the crucial moment? This is why he claimed that the spoils should be shared between Abraham and himself. Evidently, the king thought very highly of himself and his abilities. This is why the Torah describes him as: ויצא מלך סדום, "the king of Sodom came forth," he gave himself airs. According to the Midrash he compared his own experience when he fell into the clay pits (14,10) and was saved, with Abraham's having been saved from the furnace of Nimrod. The fact was, of course, that the situation of the king of Sodom who had already fought and lost, was entirely diferent from the situation described in the Talmud by Rav Ashi. When Rav Ashi said that the person rescuing the caravan's property has to declare beforehand that he does so on the understanding that if successful the property will be his, this is only in a situation where the other travellers are able to assist. Since the king of Sodom had certainly not been in a position to assist Abraham, his claim was totally spurious. Rambam and Rosh both rule like this.

When Abraham gave the balance of the loot to the king of Sodom after first having tithed it, this was a generous gesture; it did not imply that Abraham accepted any part of the king's argument.

14:22 *But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I swear to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth:*

RAMBAN

I HAVE LIFTED UP MINE HAND TO THE ETERNAL. This is an expression signifying an oath: "I lift up my hand to G-d Most High." Similarly, the verse, By myself have I sworn, means "By Myself do I swear." Thus the language of Rashi. I have found a similar text in the Sifre: "We find in the case of all the righteous that they bring their inclination under oath in order not to do evil. In the case of Abraham, he says, I have lifted up mine hand to the Eternal." It is thus similar to the verse, And he lifted up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by Him that liveth forever. But Onkelos said, "I have lifted my hand in prayer before the Eternal." The intent of Abraham's words according to Onkelos is: "I have prayed to G-d, with my hands spread forth toward heaven, if I take anything that is thine." That is to say, "G-d do so to me, and more also, if I take, etc." The correct interpretation appears to me to be that Abraham said, "I have lifted my hand to G-d to make those things Sacred and Devoted to Him, were I to take from that which is thine." Declaring things to be sacred to Him is called in Hebrew "lifting of a hand," just as in the verses: Every one that did lift up a heave offering of silver and copper; and every man that offered a wave offering of gold unto the Eternal. This Abraham said because having given a tenth of it to the priest, he declared that whatever he takes from the king of Sodom would be a heave offering to G-d, from which he would derive no benefit. In Bereshith Rabbah it is similarly said, "Abraham made it a heave offering, even as it is said, And ye shall heave a heave offering of it for the Eternal."

OR HACHAIM

Abram said to the king of Sodom. The only reason Abraham raised his hand during his declaration was to make it plain to the king of Sodom that he would not bargain further about any of this.

The reason the Torah writes the word אם twice, when it would have sufficed to write simply אם אקח מחוט ועד שרוך נעל is, that Abraham referred both to what was in the past and to anything that might occur in the future. Although he was entitled to a תרומה, some gift, in his capacity of being a priest, he waived his rights in this respect unconditionally

He also wanted to make it plain that the tithe he had removed from the loot was not a percentage he had taken for himself. Although he was in a position to waive his own claims, he had no right to waive what belonged to G'd or to His representative. This is why he had removed the tithe from the loot before waiving his own claim to the remainder.

14:23 *I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap of what is yours; you shall not say, 'It is I who made Abram rich.'*

OR HACHAIM

so that you will not be able to claim credit for enriching me. " Why would it have occurred to anyone to give credit to the king of Sodom for enriching Abraham? Was it not obvious that the Lord Himself had protected Abraham all the way?

Abraham wanted it clearly understood that the whole loot was legally his, the king had in no way given up one iota of something that was legally his, even if Abraham had consented to share the loot. Abraham chose his words carefully when he said: "you shall not say 'I have made Abraham rich.'" If there had been even a semblance of truth to what the king of Sodom had suggested, Abraham would have had to say: "I do not want to become enriched by you." The very most the king would have been able to do was to claim that he had given up something of his own; such a claim would not have been legal anyways.

14:24 *For me, nothing but what my servants have used up; as for the share of the men who went with me—Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre—let them take their share."*

OR HACHAIM

They shall take their share. Again Abraham wanted to make it clear that the share of his allies did not depend on the generosity of the king. They would take their share by right. Abraham did not want that the king of Sodom should make even a spurious statement as it would diminish Abraham's reputation even if untrue.

15:1 *Some time later, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision. He said, "Fear not, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great."*

RAMBAN

THE WORD OF THE ETERNAL CAME UNTO ABRAM IN A VISION. Abraham now merited that the word of G-d should come to him in a daytime vision for at first his prophecy came to him in nocturnal visions. The meaning of the word bemachzeh (in a vision) is as in the meaning of the verse, And all the people saw the thunderings, and the secret thereof is known to those who are learned in the mysteries of the Torah.

FEAR NOT ABRAM. Abraham feared two things: that the four kings — either they or their successors — might increase their forces against him and he would go down into the battle and perish, or that his day shall come to die without child. [To remove these two fears from Abraham, the Eternal] promised him that He will be his shield against them, and that his reward for walking with G-d shall be very great.

15:2 *But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what can You give me, seeing that I shall die childless, and the one in charge of my household is Dammesek Eliezer!"*

RAMBAN

AND ABRAM SAID, O LORD ETERNAL, WHAT WILT THOU GIVE ME? "Behold, Thou hast saved me from the kings, but Thou hast not assured me against extinction. Thou hast only said that Thou wilt give me great reward, but what can my reward be without children?" Now it had not occurred to Abraham that this great reward would be in the World to Come for there is no necessity for such a promise; every servant of G-d will find life in the hereafter before him. But in this world there are righteous men, unto whom it happened according to the work of the wicked. It is for this reason that the righteous have need of assurance. Moreover, very great implies that he will merit both worlds with all the best therein without any punishment whatever as befits the really righteous people. Moreover, an assurance is given for that which a person fears. [Hence, he needed no assurance concerning the hereafter. But he feared

being childless; therefore G-d] rejoined and explained that His assurance included that he should not fear this either, as He will make his children as the stars of heaven for multitude. You may ask: Has it not been told to Abraham already, For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth, and so, how could Abraham now say, Since I go childless...lo, my household slave will be mine heir? And why did he not believe in the first prophecy, as he would believe in this [second one which G-d will now relate to him?] The answer is that the righteous ones have no trust in themselves, fearing they might have sinned in error. Thus it is written At one instant I may speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and plant it; but if that nation turn and do evil before Me, then I repent of the good. Now when Abraham saw himself advanced in years and the first prophecy concerning him had not yet been fulfilled, he thought that his sins had withheld that good from him. And perhaps he now feared that he would be punished for the people that he killed in the war, as our Rabbis have said. They have expressed a similar thought in Bereshith Rabbah: "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and was distressed. From this we derive the principle that there is no assurance for the righteous ones in this world, etc."

WHAT WILT THOU GIVE ME, SINCE I 'HOLECH' (GO) CHILDLESS? They have explained the word holech as meaning "I die childless," even as is the meaning of that word in the verse, For man is 'holech' (going) to his eternal home. The correct interpretation appears to me to be that at first he [Abraham] complained: "What can my reward be since I have no children and I go as a vagrant and vagabond alone in a strange land, like a tamarisk in the desert, no one going out, and no one coming in in my house except Eliezer, a stranger that I brought to me from Damascus, not from my family, and not from my country." Then Abraham said, "Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed as Thou hast promised me, and lo my household slave, the one mentioned, will be mine heir, as I am old without child, and my time will come to die childless. I am thus punished, having lost the reward which Thou hast promised me at first."

15:3 *Abram said further, "Since You have granted me no offspring, my steward will be my heir."*

OR HACHAIM

...מה תתן לי? Abram said:..."what are You able to give me? How could Abraham begin by saying: "You have not given me, etc.," when he had received G'd's promise that he would father children? Surely he did not doubt G'd's words? Why did Abraham say: הן לי לא נתתה, instead of: הן לא נתתה לי? [why did he stress the word לי?] What did Abraham have in mind when he said to G'd that בן ביתי יורש אותי, that "a member of my household will inherit me?" Seeing that he had no seed of his own, what difference did it make to him if a member of his household or someone else would inherit him?

Abraham remembered that the promise of seed he had received was phrased thus: "your seed will be as the dust of the earth" (13,16). When people are compared to the dust of the earth such a comparison normally applies to poor and insignificant people, i.e. "as the dust"; it implies that such people do not possess a holy soul, that they are closer to animals than to angels. When Abraham stressed the לי aspect of his future descendants, he referred to the fact that G'd had not promised him children or grandchildren of any stature. This is why G'd told him "to count the stars." The stars were meant to be symbols. G'd wanted Abraham to know that his descendants would all be important in their own right. They would be righteous people who could overcome the stars, i.e. their fates would not be subject to zodiac constellations, to מזל. Bereshit Rabbah 69,5 explains the simile of the "dust of the earth" to mean that just as dust cannot prosper without water, so Jacob's (Abraham's) descendants would not prosper without Torah which is for the spirit what water if for the body. The Midrash there lists other qualities of dust which make it seem as something valuable and important. Examination of various Midrashim on the subject of עפר, dust, shows that we never find dust treated as something valuable until after Abraham's descendants were compared to stars for the first time. This is the reason that the quotation from the Midrash we have cited was from פרשת ויצא and not from here. At any rate, Abraham was concerned about the comparison of his descendants to dust in G'd's first promise.

The expression בן ביתי can be understood in one of two ways. 1) Abraham said to G'd that If He only intended to give him the kind of descendants that are comparable to lowly dust, he would prefer that a member of his present household would become his heir. He referred to his trusted disciple Eliezer. Such a one would be more suited than an unworthy biological descendant. A typical example would be a grandson such as Esau.

2) Not only was Abraham distressed at not having been promised worthy descendants, he was even more distressed that a בן בית such as Lot viewed himself as his heir. I have found an ancient commentary which understands Abraham as preferring to die intestate to having unworthy children.

15:4 *The word of the LORD came to him in reply, "That one shall not be your heir; none but your very own issue shall be your heir."*

RAMBAN

AND, BEHOLD, THE WORD OF THE ETERNAL CAME UNTO HIM, SAYING: THIS MAN SHALL NOT BE THINE HEIR. Since Abraham had his son who would be his heir after his old age, the Eternal assured him only concerning the inheritance, i.e., that he should not worry, and his seed will inherit it. The meaning of the expression, And, behold, the word of the Eternal came unto him, is that while Abraham was still saying, And, lo, my household slave will be mine heir, the word of G-d suddenly came to him, saying This man shall not be thine heir.

15:5 *He took him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He added, "So shall your offspring be."*

RAMBAN

AND HE BROUGHT HIM FORTH OUTSIDE. According to the simple interpretation of Scripture it means that He brought him forth from his tent into the open so that he could see the stars. And according to the Midrash its explanation is as follows: G-d said to him, "Leave your astrological speculations, for you have seen by the constellations that you are not destined to raise a son. "Abram" indeed may not have a son, but "Abraham" will have a son; "Sarai" will not bear a child, but "Sarah" will bear a child. Thus the language of Rashi. But 'Abram' did have Ishmael! The meaning of the Midrash, however, is that Abram sought a son who would qualify to become his heir, [which excluded Ishmael, who would not inherit him],

even as he said, And, lo, my household slave will be mine heir. The Holy One, blessed be He, then said to him, "This man shall not be thine heir, but one born of thine own body shall be thine heir, and leave your astrological speculations. 'Abram' will not have a son as his heir, but 'Abraham' will have a son as his heir." It is also possible that the astrological speculation concerned the pair together, namely, the "Abram and Sarai" as a pair will not beget children, and the Eternal now assured him that "Abraham and Sarah" will beget children. In my opinion, however, [the Divine assurance now given to Abraham did not mention Sarah, rather], her name is an addition on the part of the Midrash, meaning that such indeed was the case also with Sarah. The Holy One, blessed be He, however, did not assure him concerning Sarah at the present time. Even at the time of the prophecy concerning the circumcision, Abraham was still in doubt whether "Sarah" would bear a child.

15:6 *And because he put his trust in the LORD, He reckoned it to his merit.*

RAMBAN

AND HE BELIEVED IN THE ETERNAL; AND HE ACCOUNTED IT TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Rashi's explanation is: The Holy One, blessed be He, accounted it to Abraham for righteousness and merit because of the faith with which he had trusted in Him. But I do not understand the nature of this merit. Why should he not believe in the G-d of truth, and he himself is the prophet, and G-d is not a man, that He should lie? Furthermore, he who believed [and on the basis of this belief was ready] to sacrifice his only son, the beloved one, and withstood the rest of the trials, how could he not believe a good tiding? The correct interpretation appears to me to be that the verse is stating that Abraham believed in G-d and he considered it due to the righteousness of the Holy One, blessed be He, that He would give him a child under all circumstances, and not because of Abram's state of righteousness and his reward, even though He told him, Your reward shall be very great. Thus from now on he would no longer have to fear that sin might prevent the fulfillment of the promise. Now although in the case of the first prophecy Abraham had thought that the promise was conditional upon the recompense for his deeds, yet now since He promised him that he should have no fear on account of sin and that He will give him a child, he believed that the thing is established by G-d, truth He will not turn from it. For since this is a matter of the righteousness of G-d, it has no break in continuity, even as it is written, By Myself have I sworn, saith the Eternal, the word is gone forth from My mouth in righteousness, and shall not come back. It may be that the verse is stating that Abraham believed that he would have a child as an heir under all circumstances, but the Holy One, blessed be He, accounted to him that this promise He had assured him would in addition be as righteousness since in His righteousness G-d did so, just as it says, G-d thought it for good. A similar case is the verse regarding Phinehas: And that was accounted unto him for righteousness, meaning that the trust he [Phinehas] has in G-d when committing that particular deed was accounted as righteousness unto all generations since G-d will forever keep His righteousness and kindness for every generation on account of [Phinehas' deed, and this recompense transcends any strictly merited reward]. This is similar to that which is stated, Forever will I keep for him My mercy.

OR HACHAIM

He believed G'd who considered this as a merit for him. We can understand this as similar to the laws concerning vows. The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 6) says that when one makes a promise to give charity to a sacred cause it is considered as binding or as effective as if one had already actually handed over the object of a vow to an ordinary person. Abraham qualified for a reward by merely expressing his belief in G'd's promise. You may well ask what practical benefit Abraham received by this reward seeing that neither Ishmael nor Isaac had been born as yet? This is why the Torah says that "he considered it an act of righteousness," i.e. also Abraham treated G'd's promise to him as if it had already been fulfilled.

Furthermore, seeing that G'd cannot influence whether man is G'd fearing or not, i.e. "all is in the hands of heaven except the fear of heaven" (Berachot 33), Abraham could have had doubts about G'd's promise as to the quality of his offspring. The Torah therefore gives Abraham credit for not worrying how G'd could guarantee his children would be worthy. Another way of looking at Abraham's act of faith is based on the tradition (Pessikta Zutra Lech Lecha 15,5) that the world will not lack a minimum of 30 (or 36) righteous men by whose merit it continues to exist. This tradition is based on the numerical value of the word יהיה in the previous verse. Since G'd needs these 30 צדיקים, it stands to reason that He does influence these men to be pious. If so, they can certainly not claim their righteousness as their own merit as would otherwise be the case. (Compare Deut. 6,28 וצדקה תהיה לנו that performance of the commandments will be accounted as a merit for us). Abraham may have been rewarded then for not making an issue of this, although some or all of these men may have been unduly influenced to live the lives of צדיקים.

שישי SIXTH ALIYAH

15:7 *Then He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to assign this land to you as a possession."*

RAMBAN

I AM THE ETERNAL WHO BROUGHT THEE OUT OF UR OF THE CHALDEES, TO GIVE THEE THIS LAND TO INHERIT IT. I have already explained this verse as stating: "From the time I brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees and performed a miracle for you [which saved your life], it was the Will before Me to give you this land." But at this present moment He did not decree giving it to Abraham, rather he said that He had brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees with the intention of giving it to him. It was for this reason that Abraham feared lest a condition of good deeds be attached to the inheritance of the land even though He already had told him twice, Unto thy seed will I give this land, since He did not decree the gift of the land now as He did decree to give him a child. Therefore, Abraham said, Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? This is not similar to the question of Hezekiah, What shall be the sign that the Eternal will heal me? The Holy One, blessed be He, also did not act with Abraham as He did with the other signs by showing him a sign or wonder in some miraculous matter. But Abraham desired to have definite knowledge that he would inherit the land and that neither his sin nor that of his seed would withhold it from them. Or perhaps the Canaanites might re-

pent, in which case the following verse might apply to them: At one instant I may speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to break down and destroy it; but if that nation turn from their evil... I repent of the evil that I thought to do unto it. And then the Holy One, blessed be He, made a covenant with him that he will inherit the land under all circumstances.

15:9 *He answered, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young bird."*

RAMBAN

A HEIFER 'MESHULESHETH' AND A SHE-GOAT 'MESHULESHETH.' Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra explained the word meshulesheth as meaning three years old. But Onkelos said "three." This is indeed correct since a three-year old cow is no longer called eglah (heifer), just as we have learned in a Mishnah: "But the Sages say that an eglah (heifer) is two years old; a parah (cow) is three years old." The allusion here is to the three sacrifices which his seed will bring from them before Him: the Whole-offering, the Sin-offering and the Peace-offering. And as for the Guilt-offering, that is like the Sin-offering, the difference between them being merely in the name. It is possible that the meaning of the word meshulesheth is that he bring the three of them consecutively, each kind remaining separate. A similar use of this word is found in the verse, For they were in 'meshulashoth' (three) stories, meaning that there were upper, middle and lower chambers.

15:10 *He brought Him all these and cut them in two, placing each half opposite the other; but he did not cut up the bird.*

RAMBAN

AND HE DIVIDED THEM IN THE MIDST. This he did in order that He make the covenant with him, to pass between these parts. He thereby alluded to Abraham that all sacrifices of cattle and fowl will be from these species since the gozeil (young pigeon) mentioned here is identical with the ben yonah (young pigeon) mentioned in the Book of Leviticus. Here it is called gozeil to indicate that only the young of this specie are fit for sacrifices. Now even though all young fowl are called gozlim — as it is said, As an eagle that stirreth up her nest, hovereth over 'gozalav' (his young ones) — Abraham understood on his own that the command of the Eternal applied to the kind which was to be selected [by the Torah, namely, young pigeons]. It may be that Abraham followed his own will in offering a young pigeon, and Scripture selected forever the specie which the patriarch had offered. Thus did Abraham know that the sacrifices would be of these species and that all of them would be divided into parts: the Whole-offering into its pieces, the Peace-offering into the breast, shoulder and fats, and the Sin-offering and the Guilt-offering into their fats.

BUT THE BIRD HE DID NOT SPLIT. He placed the turtle-dove and the young pigeon opposite each other for they too were in the covenant, but Abraham did not split them in the middle since concerning all fowl offered on the altar it says, He shall not separate it. In Bereshith Rabbah the Sages said, "The Holy One, blessed be He, indicated to him that in a bird Whole-offering, the ministering-priest severs both the gullet and the windpipe, but in a bird Sin-offering he does not sever" [the head from the body, as he must cut one and not both of the organs].

15:11 *Birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.*

RAMBAN

AND THE BIRDS OF PREY CAME DOWN UPON THE CARCASSES. [They came down] to eat them, as is the nature of birds.

AND ABRAM DROVE THEM AWAY. It was thus alluded to Abraham that the nations would come to abolish the sacrifices, but the children of Abraham would drive them away.

15:12 *As the sun was about to set, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a great dark dread descended upon him.*

RAMBAN

AND LO, A DREAD, EVEN A GREAT DARKNESS FELL UPON HIM. The Rabbis in the Midrash have interpreted this fourfold expression to be an allusion to the servitude of the four exiles, for the prophet Abraham found his soul overtaken by "a dread," followed by "darkness," which in turn became "a great darkness," and then he felt as if an overwhelmingly heavy load "fell" upon him. Thus the Rabbis have said: "A dread, this is Babylon. Darkness, this is Media that darkened the eyes of Israel with fasting and affliction. Great, this is the kingdom of Antiochus. Fell upon him, this is Edom. This experience came to Abraham because when the Holy One, blessed be He, made a covenant with him to give the land to his children as an everlasting possession, He said to him, by way of a residuary of His gift, that during the four exiles the nations will subjugate his children and rule in their land, subject to the condition that they sin before Him. Following this general allusion, He then informed him explicitly concerning another exile into which they will first go, namely, the Egyptian exile with which he had already been punished, as I have explained.

15:13 *And He said to Abram, "Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years;*

RAMBAN

THAT THY SEED SHALL BE A STRANGER. This is a verse that is to be transposed, its purport being that "thy seed shall be a stranger for four hundred years in a land that is not theirs, and they shall enslave them, and they shall afflict them." He has thus not specified the length of the period of servitude and affliction. There are many cases in Scripture where verses must be transposed if they are to be interpreted properly. Thus: There came unto me the Hebrew servant, who thou hast brought unto us, to mock me; And all countries came into Egypt to buy corn to Joseph; For whosoever eateth leavened bread, that soul shall be cut off from Israel, from the first day until the seventh day; In that day a man shall cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats; Come, and hearken, and I will declare, all ye that fear G-d, what He hath done for my soul; They cry unto Me, My G-d we Israel know Thee; And they shall be Mine, saith the Eternal of hosts, in the day that I do make, even Mine own treasure, and I will spare them. There are many other such verses. The sense of the verse is: "Even though I tell you that I have given this land to your children, you should surely know that before I give it to them they shall be strangers for four hundred years in a land not belonging to them, and they shall

also enslave them and afflict them." Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said [that the verse should be interpreted as follows]: "You should surely know that your children shall be strangers in servitude and affliction until the end of a four hundred year period commencing from this day of the covenant." If so, G-d informed Abraham of the time of the redemption, but He did not inform him of the exact length of the exile. This too is correct.

OR HACHAIM

He said to Abram, etc. Why did G'd say ידע תדע, instead of simply תדע, know! Why did the Torah stress the word גר in גר יהיה זרעך, instead of the more customary זרעך יהיה גר? The Torah does not usually mention what happens before having stated to whom it is going to happen! Why does the Torah not make it clear when and to whom the various stages of being a stranger, being enslaved, and being afflicted apply? Will Abraham's descendants experience all these stages of unpleasantness for the whole of the 400 years, or will some experience some of the afflictions and others only being strangers such as history has taught us?

I believe the Torah repeated the words ידע תדע for three separate reasons. 1) Our sages said: "our forefathers descended to Egypt on account of a relatively minor sin, i.e. Abraham having asked: 'How will I know that I will inherit'" (Genesis 15,8)? G'd answered him; ידוע, "know! that because you asked, תדע you should be aware that your descendants will first be strangers, etc." 2) Seeing that G'd's response to Abraham's question contained both a pleasant and an unpleasent message, i.e. enslavement and subsequent redemption, G'd told Abraham that just as surely as there would first be enslavement, this would be followed by redemption. 3) Our sages (Berachot 18) commented on Deut. 34,4: זאת הארץ אשר נשבעתי לאברהם, ליצחק וליעקב לאמד לזרעך אתננה, that G'd told Moses לאמר, to tell the patriarchs that He had fulfilled the oath He had sworn to all of them regarding the land of Israel. In view of this the repeated use of the expression ידע תדע refers to both the present and the eventual status of that land.

The reason that the word גר is stressed by being placed ahead of what is going to happen, is to inform us that the status of being an alien commenced already at this time. Abraham's life from here on in was part of the decree. Abraham should not think that his descendants' history would parallel his own experience to the extent that they would be aliens only part of these 400 years. Abraham was not to misunderstand the meaning of the words כי גר יהיה זרעך as applying only at some time in the future. That period would commence the day he would have descendants, i.e. with the birth of Isaac. This was also a pleasant aspect of the decree in that all the years Isaac and Jacob lived either in the land of Canaan or at Laban's were counted as part of the 400 years.

Should you argue that this could have been expressed equally well by use of the normal syntax כי זרעך גר יהיה, know that G'd wisely phrased it differently in order to reveal that He had not decreed slavery and oppression for all of Abraham's descendants. G'd wanted that Abraham should have the satisfaction of knowing that some of his descendants would only have to suffer being aliens, nothing worse. It is as if G'd had said to Abraham: "you will have a share in your descendants," i.e. they will only suffer being strangers without suffering anything worse. Had G'd used the word זרעך first, this would have created the wrong impression. By inserting the word יהיה between the words גר and זרעך the Torah makes clear that some of Abraham's descendants would experience only גרות. The descendants referred to were Isaac, Jacob, and all of Jacob's sons. As a result what sounded like 400 years of enslavement and oppression actually was reduced to 210 years, the years remaining before the Exodus after the last of Joseph's brothers had died. Even the tribe of Levi who, according to our sages never performed slave labour, did not completely escape the aspects of enslavement and oppression seeing that its babies too were subject to drowning. Moses' own experience when his basket stood in the bulrushes at the banks of the Nile, is the best proof for the anxieties suffered by even the most prominent families of the Levites.

15:14 *but I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve, and in the end they shall go free with great wealth.*

RAMBAN

'VEGAM' (AND ALSO) THAT NATION THAT MADE SLAVES OF THEM WILL I JUDGE. The words, And also, include the kingdoms of the four exiles which will be judged for having enslaved Israel. Thus the language of Rashi. By way of the simple meaning of Scripture, the verse is stating: "Just as I decreed exile and affliction for your children on account of sin, so will I bring judgment upon the nation that will enslave them for the violence they will do to them." The correct meaning of the word vegam appears to me to be as follows: Even though I have decreed that your children be strangers in a land not their own, and they shall enslave them and afflict them, I will nevertheless judge the nation that will enslave them for what they will do to them, and they will not be exonerated for having done My decree." The reason for this is as Scripture states: I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy; and I am very sore displeased with the nations that are at ease; for I was but a little displeased, and they helped for evil. And it says again, I was wroth with My people, I profaned Mine inheritance, and gave them into thy hand; thou didst show them no mercy; upon the aged hast thou very heavily laid the yoke. Such was the case with the Egyptians who increased the evil. They threw the children of the Israelites into the river, embittered their lives, and they intended to eradicate their name from memory. This is the meaning of the expression will I judge, i.e., "I will bring them to judgment to determine whether they did as was decreed upon them or if they increased the evil inflicted upon them." It is this principle which Jethro stated: For it is the thing wherein they acted presumptuously [that caused the punishment to come] upon them. It was their presumptuousness that brought upon the Egyptians the great punishment which utterly destroyed them. And this principle is also expressed in the verse: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. Now the Rabbi stated the reason [for the punishment of the Egyptians — a punishment meted out even though it had been decreed that they were to enslave the Israelites] — in the Book of Knowledge: "It had not been decreed on any particular [Egyptian that he was to afflict the Israelites], and if any one of all those who perpetrated evil against Israel had not wanted to do it, he had the liberty to do so since the decree was not directed at any specific person." But to me the Rabbi's words are not reconciled with the facts. Even if the Holy One, blessed be He, were to decree that any individual among all the nations should do them [the Israelites] evil in such-and-such a manner, and this specific individual fulfilled His decree with alacrity, he has the merit of fulfilling a Divine commandment. What sense is there in the Rabbi's words? If a king were to command that the

inhabitants of a certain country do a particular deed, he who is slack and throws the matter upon others offends and sins against himself, while he who does it wins the king's favor. And this is all the more since Scripture states, And also that nation that made slaves of them, which clearly implies that the entire Egyptian nation was to enslave them, and they came to Egypt of their own free will! Instead, the reason [for the punishment of the Egyptians] is as I have written above. Our Rabbis already mentioned this matter when they said in Shmoth Rabbah: "This may be likened to a lord who told his son that he should work for a certain person who should not cause him any suffering. So he went and worked for him. Now even though he worked for him without recompense, the master did not cease causing him suffering. When the lord finally was reconciled with his son, he decreed death to those who caused his son suffering. Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He, decreed that Israel be in servitude in Egypt. But the Egyptians overwhelmed them and enslaved them by force. "Said the Holy One, blessed be He: 'You should have used them as servants who would do your needs. I was but a little displeased, and they helped for evil.'" Thus far [is the quote from the Midrash Shmoth Rabbah]. Now it is clear that throwing Hebrew children into the river was not included in the decree, And they shall enslave them, and afflict them, for this would result in their complete destruction. Similarly, that which the Egyptians said at first, Come, let us deal wisely with them lest they multiply is not part of servitude or affliction. Besides, they themselves increased the degree of affliction, as Scripture testifies, And they made their lives bitter with hard service, etc. It is this which Scripture states in the following verse: And he saw our affliction, and our toil, and our oppression. Know and understand that a person who, on the New Year, has been inscribed and sealed for a violent death, the bandits who kill him will not be guiltless because they fulfilled that which had been decreed against him. That wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will be sought from the murderer. However, when a decree issues from the mouth of a prophet, there are different laws concerning one who fulfills it. If he heard it and he wishes to fulfill the Will of his Creator as decreed, there is no sin upon him for doing so. On the contrary, it is accounted to him as a merit, just as it is said concerning King Jehu: Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in Mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in My heart, thy sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel. However, if he heard the command and killed him out of his personal hatred or in order to take his wealth, he is subject to punishment for his intention was to sin, and it is accounted to him as a transgression. Scripture so states with respect to Sennacherib, [king of Assyria]: O Asshur the rod of Mine anger... I do send him against an ungodly nation, and against the people of My wrath do I give him a charge. And Scripture continues: but not so doth he mean, neither doth his heart think so, but it is in his heart to destroy. This is why he was punished in the end, just as it is said, Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Eternal hath performed his whole work... I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks, etc. Again it says concerning Sennacherib: Israel is a scattered sheep, the lions have driven him away; first the king of Assyria hath devoured him, and last this Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon. ...Therefore thus said the Eternal... Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria. This is proof that the king of Assyria was punished because of the evil he did to Israel. Now Nebuchadrezzar heard that the prophets unanimously called upon him to destroy Jerusalem, and he and all his people were commanded to do this by word of the prophet, as it is written, Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the Eternal, and I will send unto Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof... and I will utterly destroy them. And it is further written, Behold I will give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, and into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon... and they shall set the city on fire. Concerning the Sanctuary itself, the prophet said, I will make this house like Shiloh. The Chaldeans knew that it was the command of G-d, as Nebuzaradan [captain of the guard of the King of Babylon] said to Jeremiah, The Eternal thy G-d pronounced this evil upon this place; and the Eternal hath brought it, and done according as He spoke, because ye have sinned against the Eternal. Yet despite this, the Chaldeans were all punished in the end. This was because of two reasons. First, Nebuchadrezzar also intended to destroy the entire land in order to increase his authority, as it is written concerning him: And I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the tyrants; and again it is written: And thou hast said in thy heart, I will ascend into heaven... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High. Concerning his nation it is written, Thou sayest in thy heart: I am, and there is none else beside me. Habakkuk the prophet said concerning him, Woe to him that gaineth evil gains for his house, that he may set his nest on high, etc. Thus Nebuchadrezzar's punishment is as that of Sennacherib. It is for this reason that Scripture says, Therefore thus saith the Eternal... Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria. And there was yet another reason for punishment in the case of the king of Babylon, i.e., for his having added to the decree and having exceedingly perpetrated evil against Israel, as it is said concerning him, I was wroth with My people, I profaned Mine inheritance, and gave them into thy hand; thou didst show no mercy, upon the aged hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke. Therefore did a twofold punishment come upon him: his people were utterly destroyed, there remaining of Babylon no name and remnant, offshoot and offspring, and his city was destroyed forever, as it is said, And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, shall be as when G-d overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelled in from generation to generation... But wild-cats shall lie there... and satyrs shall dance there. Scripture further states concerning him, For it is the vengeance of the Eternal, the vengeance of His temple, and it is written, 'The violence done to me and to my flesh be upon Babylon,' shall the inhabitants of Zion say; and 'My blood be upon the inhabitants of Chaldaea,' shall Jerusalem say. Therefore thus saith the Eternal: Behold, I will plead thy cause, and take vengeance for thee. There are many verses like these.

OR HACHAIM

I will also judge the nation for whom they perform slave labour. What justification is there for the word "also" in this verse? The last subject the Torah spoke about was enslavement and oppression. How can the retribution be linked to the former by the word וגם, "and also?" Besides, as we are all aware that G'd is the judge, why does G'd have to say דן אנכי, "I will judge?" Who else could possibly judge? Why does the Torah

write את הגוי instead of merely הגוי, "the nation?" Why does the Torah not mention the conclusion of the Jewish people's exile experience at the end of verse 13 by adding: "after that they will depart with great possessions," and then add the part about G'd's retribution to the Egyptians in verse 14? Why was the part about the retribution inserted in the middle of the sequence? The last question is probably best answered by recalling that events actually happened in precisely the order the Torah describes. First the Jews were enslaved and oppressed, then G'd smote the Egyptians with the ten plagues; finally the Jews left Egypt having "borrowed" all of the Egyptians' gold and silver.

An equally valid explanation of the sequence of the verse will become clear when we keep in mind what our sages had to say on Exodus 13,18. We read there that וחמושים עלו בני ישראל מארץ מצרים. According to the Mechilta the meaning is that only one out of five Israelites left Egypt, the remainder having died in Egypt during the plague of darkness so as not to afford the Egyptians the satisfaction to observe that they had not been worthy of redemption. The judgments that verse 14 speaks about then would be G'd judging the Israelites who did not merit to participate in the Exodus. The verse also alludes to the opportunity the Israelites had to examine where the Egyptians kept their valuables during the days of darkness, and to subsequently demand to borrow those. The expression וגם is used to demonstrate that G'd kept the promise made to Abraham here. This was recorded in Exodus 12,35-36. The word וגם means that G'd referred to something in addition to the decree of enslavement, namely that the redemption would be accompanied by a windfall of silver and gold, a compensation for some of the suffering to be endured. The word את refers to the death of 80% of the Israelites, whereas the word אנכי refers to the fact that this was something only G'd himself would know about; the Egyptians would not have any idea that some Jews died during the plague of darkness.

The question arises why G'd punished the Egyptians altogether when they had actually carried out the decree G'd had announced long previously.

Maimonides already answered this in his ספר המדע, explaining that G'd had never appointed a specific nation to carry out His decree. Whenever Gentile nations abuse Jews and this appears to be a fulfilment of a divine decree, none of the Gentiles had ever been specifically charged to be G'd's agents in the matter. Nachmanides and Rabbi Avraham ben David both take issue with Maimonides on this. They feel that inasmuch as those Gentiles had carried out G'd's wishes they had actually performed a מצוה. Nachmanides explains that the reason that G'd punished those nations was that they carried out the commandment with excessive enthusiasm. They demonstrated that they were intent on inflicting maximum discomfort on the Jews rather than to carry out G'd's will by what they did. When we keep this in mind, the word וגם refers to the excessive zeal displayed by the nations who persecute us which is the reason that G'd judges them. The word את then means that while G'd is busy punishing the Gentiles, He punishes the Jews who deserve it at one and the same time.

The Gentile nations persecute us because we separated ourselves from them by rejecting their religion. Had the Jewish people worshiped the lamb (Egyptian deity) in Egypt, the chances are the Egyptians would not have seen in us a foreign element and they would not have persecuted us. The same holds true throughout our history. Our persecution by the nations (at least from their point of view) has always been due to our refusal to accept their religious yardsticks, and to our describing ourselves as G'd's chosen people. The Gentile nations never viewed themselves as performing G'd's decree to punish us for our sins. There is therefore no question that they deserve retribution for what they did to us on their own initiative. G'd decreed that we be punished because we did not observe all of His commandments, whereas they persecuted us for not disregarding all of His commandments. This is what the prophet Zecharyah 1,15 had in mind when he quoted G'd as saying: אני קצפתי מעט והמה עזרו לרעה, "I was angry a little (because of a few sins Israel committed), and they overdid the punishment." In fact the Gentile nations contributed to our transgressing more of G'd's commandments because they maltreated us so much.

G'd goes on record here that He knows the true motivations of our oppressors and that is why He will punish the Egyptians. The Torah continues by linking Israel's redemption to the degree of abuse they would experience at the hands of the Egyptians by saying: ואחרי כן יצאו, "and as a result of this (exaggerated maltreatment) they will depart with great belongings;" Israel's redemption would be due in large measure to the excessive cruelty of its oppressors rather than to its accumulated merits. Sanhedrin 104 tells about the delegation the Egyptians sent to Alexander the Great demanding that the Jews return the silver and gold they had taken with them from Egypt at the time of the Exodus. Israel's representative countered by demanding back-pay with interest for several hundred years of slave labour by over a half a million of its people for over 200 years.

Our verse also contains a hint that when the Israelites went down to Egypt G'd's presence accompanied them (Megillah 29). Psalms 91,15: "I will be with him (Israel) in distress," is also proof that the שכינה accompanies the Jewish people into exile. Another indication that our verse speaks about the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt is Exodus 24,10 where the nobles of Israel had a vision of a sapphire brick underneath the throne of G'd. This is an allusion to G'd having been present when the Israelites were engaged in brick-making in Egypt.

15:15 *As for you, You shall go to your fathers in peace; You shall be buried at a ripe old age.*

RAMBAN

AND THOU SHALT COME TO THY FATHERS IN PEACE. And thou shalt not behold at this. Thus the language of Rashi. This is not correct according to Rashi's own interpretation, namely, that the decree, thy seed shall be a stranger in a land not their own, took effect as soon as Abraham had a child. Thus, soon after Isaac was born it states, And Abraham sojourned ('vayagar') in the land of the Philistines; And Isaac sojourned in Gerar. Now if so, Abraham was also included in the decree! But the meaning of the verse, And thou shalt come to thy fathers in peace, is that "no punishment will come to you from Me even though I decree on your children punishments of servitude and affliction."

OR HACHAIM

As for you yourself, you will join your forefathers in peace . Why did the Torah interrupt the promises made to Abraham's descendants with a promise to Abraham personally? Even though G'd wanted to reassure Abraham that he personally would not experience the part of the decree connected with enslavement and oppression, this could have been stated after G'd had concluded telling him which generation would experience

the redemption! The meaning would have been clear since the promise was adjoining the promise that Israel would experience redemption! Besides, why did the Torah have to repeat itself, stressing: a) "in peace," and b) "in a ripe old age?" Would it not have sufficed to promise Abraham that he would die in a ripe old age before the enslavement of his descendants would commence? The promise of death in a ripe old age would have implied that Ishmael would become a penitent, as pointed out by Bereshit Rabbah 38,12.

Righteous people, and especially our patriarchs, were always concerned with losing part of the reward they had stored up for use in the Hereafter through some act of kindness G'd would perform for them in this world. According to Bereshit Rabbah 44,4 Abraham worried that he might have caused the death of an innocent person in his war against the four kings and that as a result he had forfeited some of his eternal reward. G'd therefore reassured him by saying in 15,1: "Do not worry, your reward will be great." In view of the concern that Abraham displayed then it is reasonable to assume that he was similarly worried whether the eventual redemption from Egypt would not use up too many merits if it were accompanied by extraneous perks such as the רכוש גדול, acquisition of material wealth that would accompany it. What troubled Abraham was that clearly G'd would have to perform miracles in order to free his enslaved descendants when the time came. G'd wanted to put his mind at rest immediately; this is why He interrupted the prediction of what was going to happen by promising Abraham that his peace of mind would not be disturbed. The promise of שלום, refers to Abraham's peace of mind in the Hereafter, whereas the שיבה טובה, ripe old age, refers to his concerns about life on earth.

15:16 *And they shall return here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."*

RAMBAN

AND IN THE FOURTH GENERATION THEY SHALL COME BACK HITHER. After they are exiled into Egypt, they will be there for three generations. And thus it happened; Jacob was exiled into Egypt. Go and reckon his generations: Judah, Peretz, Chetzron, and Caleb the son of Chetzron was amongst those who entered the Land. Thus the language of Rashi. But this is not correct at all. The correct interpretation appears to be that the fourth generation refers to the Amorite whose sin will then become full, for from the day of the decree He prolonged the time of the Amorite, as He visits iniquity upon the third and fourth generation. Had the Amorites repented of their iniquities He would not have utterly destroyed them. Rather, they would have been a levy of bondservants, or they might have gone elsewhere.

THE INIQUITY OF THE AMORITE. He mentioned the strongest among them, Whose height was like the height of the cedars. The Israelites would not be able to overpower him until his measure of sin was full and his own iniquities will ensnare him. Moreover the Amorite was the first one to be captured by them, and it was his land which they inherited first.

OR HACHAIM

And the fourth generation will return here, etc. We must examine why the extent of the sins of the Emorite has a bearing on the timing of Israel's return to its homeland. Rashi and Nachmanides disagree on what the words "the fourth generation" refer to. Rashi understands them as a reference to the fourth generation from Yehudah (who descended to Egypt). His son was Peretz, his grandson was Chetzron; great grandson Caleb returned to the land of Israel. Nachmanides rejects Rashi's explanation preferring to understand the words as referring to a fourth generation of Emorites. He bases himself on G'd waiting up to four generations before visiting the sins of the fathers on their descendants (Exodus 34,7). Even if we accept the words of Nachmanides, why did G'd mention this fact to Abraham? Besides, it appears that no provision was made for the possible penitence of the Emorite, which, according to Nachmanides, would have delayed a return of the Jewish people to their homeland still further? Furthermore, assuming that Nachmanides is correct, why did G'd mention the sin of the Emorite altogether once He had told Abraham that the Jewish people would return to their homeland in the fourth generation?

Actually, G'd told Abraham of two possible timetables according to which the return of his descendants to the land of Canaan could occur. One is the end of the exile in Egypt and the oppression there. This would occur when the combination of the years of being a stranger, being enslaved, and finally being oppressed (עינוי), would total 400 years. At that point G'd's decree would have been completed and He could lead the Jewish people forth from Egypt on the very day that those years came to an end. The second time factor which would enable the Jewish people to return to their homeland would be determined by the measure of guilt the Emorites had accumulated by that time. This would occur in the fourth generation, a generation later than the Exodus. For the purpose of this calculation the generation of Caleb is considered the third generation inasmuch as Caleb left Egypt as an adult. Even though Caleb personally entered the Holy Land (Numbers 14,30), the entry of a single Jew certainly does not constitute the return of a people to their homeland. When the Torah speaks about a generation it refers to the majority of the members of that generation. Caleb's sons constituted part of the fourth generation, as did all those who had not attained the age of 20 prior to the Exodus. The four generations are not to be counted as commencing with Yehudah, as does Rashi. If we were to count in Rashi's fashion i.e. from the time G'd's decree became effective, there is no reason why Isaac himself should not be considered as a generation either, seeing that the 400 years commenced with his birth. If, on the other hand, we are to count the generations as commencing with the first Jew who descended to Egypt, the count should commence with Jacob. If we did this, Caleb himself would already be the fifth generation. It is clear then that the count was meant to commence with the period the Israelites experienced enslavement. Shemot Rabbah 1,5 states that as long as any of Joseph's brothers was alive none of the Israelites were enslaved. The calculation of the fourth generation the Torah speaks about here therefore commences with Yehudah's sons Peretz and Chetzron.

The fact that the Torah uses the plural when speaking about the return of the Jewish people is a hint that the Torah speaks about people who have been forcibly prevented from returning up until that time. They would return after four generations have been completed. The first generation of Israelites who were forcibly prevented from returning to the land of Canaan were the children of Joseph and his brothers.

We now need to understand why the guilt of the Emorite plays any role in all this when the Torah elsewhere told us in Numbers 14 that the sin of the spies and the generation who believed the ten spies was the cause that re-entry to the land of Israel was delayed by an additional generation. The 400 years G'd had decreed were completed at the time the Jewish people asked that the spies be sent out. Had they not done so, they would have entered the land of Israel at the end of the 400 years G'd speaks about in our פרשה. This would have coincided with the 3rd generation of the Jews who had experienced servitude. The additional generation was due to the sin of the spies. Assuming this tragic delay had not occurred, how could G'd have squared entry of the Jewish people to the land of Canaan with the measure of guilt of the Emorites the Torah speaks about here?

We must understand the Torah in terms of how the Talmud Berachot 7 explains Chabakuk 1,13: למה תביט בוגדים, תחריש בבלע רשע צדיק ממנו, "Why do You countenance treachery, and stand by idly when the one in the wrong devours the one in the right?" The Talmud says that while it is possible that the wicked triumphs over someone relatively more righteous than he, he will never triumph over someone truly righteous. This means that the wicked are not totally devoid of merits, and we find on occasion that by using their merit they can overcome someone else who is generally more pious than they (while on this earth). The reason is that the wicked at that time can point at the imperfections of the person who thinks of himself as righteous. When the wicked is absolutely wicked however, it is not only permissible to destroy him but whichever righteous person does so first deserves credit. One need not be a totally righteous person in order to be entitled to wipe out such a wicked person.

At the time of the Exodus as well as at the time when they despatched the spies about 15 months later, the Israelites were on the level of perfectly righteous people. Although they had sinned during the episode of the golden calf, they had been punished for that sin and had regained their status as צדיקים גמורים, as perfectly righteous people. The "echo" of that sin was not strong enough to deprive them of that title especially vis-a-vis the Emorites. In Sanhedrin 110 Rabbi Eliezer describes the people at that time as pious, quoting Psalms 50,5: "bring in My devotees, who made a covenant with Me over sacrifice" as his support. After the episode with the spies, Israel lost this status. From that moment on their moral superiority over the Emorites was marginal. As long as they had been considered חסידים their merit was enough to overcome the Emorites immediately. If the Emorites had refused to vacate the land in order to allow Israel to return there, they could have easily overcome them in battle. Now they had to wait until the Emorites accumulated a further measure of sin before their own moral superiority would suffice to overcome the Emorites in their homeland. Proof of our contention is found in Numbers 14,44 when the Israelites had realised that they had sinned grievously in fearing the Canaanites, and volunteered to fight them. Moses warned them against such an enterprise. They insisted and were defeated. Had they been considered as righteous they certainly would not have been defeated. All of this is an elaboration of what the prophet Chabakuk spoke about.

The point is underscored by Moses in Deut. 9.5, where Moses credits Israel's conquest of the land of the Canaanites not to their piety but to the wickedness of the inhabitants of that land at that time. Moses meant that the measure of their sins had become full by that time. Moses told the Israelites at that time that though they were not totally righteous, their merit was sufficient to overcome the complete lack of it in their opponents. He emphasised this lack of righteousness by the Israelites three times! However, the Emorites had absolutely no merits left that they could have used to help them triumph against Israel's various moral shortcomings.

We now understand the need for mentioning the "fourth generation" in G'd's promise in our verse. G'd stated that the latest possible date for Israel taking over its inheritance would be at the end of four generations since the onset of slavery. By that time the Emorites would not have any merit left they could use to deny Israel their return to the land of their forefathers. This part of the prophecy would become relevant only if Israel did not maintain sufficient moral superiority over the Canaanites, if they did not qualify for the appellation צדיק גמור.

15:17 *When the sun set and it was very dark, there appeared a smoking oven, and a flaming torch which passed between those pieces.*

RAMBAN

AND BEHOLD, A SMOKING FURNACE, AND A FLAMING TORCH. It appeared to Abraham as if the furnace was all smoke and in its midst a flaming torch was burning, similar to a great smoke, with a fire flashing up. The "smoke" mentioned here is the cloud, and thick darkness mentioned at the giving of the Torah, and "the flaming torch" in its midst is "the fire" mentioned there: And thou didst hear His words out of the midst of the fire; and it is further written: And the appearance of the glory of the Eternal was like devouring fire, etc. Thus the Divine Glory passed between the parts of the sacrifices, and this is the covenant which He made with Abraham forever. This is the meaning of the verse, the Eternal made a covenant with Abraham, as the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself carried through "the covenant of between the parts." The student versed in the mysteries of the Torah will understand.

15:18 *On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I assign this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates:*

RAMBAN

IN THAT DAY THE ETERNAL MADE A COVENANT WITH ABRAM, SAYING. Now the Holy One, blessed be He, promised Abraham the gift of the land many times, and all of the promises served a purpose. When he originally arrived in the land, He said to him, Unto thy seed will I give this land, but He did not clarify the extent of His gift, for included in this promise is only the land where he walked, unto the place of Shechem unto the oak of Moreh. Afterwards, when his merits increased while in the Land, He bestowed upon him the additional promise: Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward, and eastward and westward, meaning that He will give him all those lands in their totality, for the meaning of the expression, which thou seest, is not literally "with your eyes" for the sight of a person does not extend far. Rather, it means that He will give him [land which lies in] every direction in which he looks. It may be that He miraculously showed him all the land of Israel, as was the case with Moshe Rabbeinu. He further added in this second blessing: and to thy seed forever, and that his seed will increase as the dust of the

earth. At the third time, He clarified to him the boundaries of the land, mentioning all the ten nations [who presently inhabited it], and in addition He made a covenant with him that sin would not cause [the annulment of the gift]. When He commanded him concerning circumcision, He told him, for a possession forever, that is to say, if they will be exiled from it they will again return and inherit it. He also added at that time, And I will be their G-d, meaning that He in His Glory will lead them, and they shall not be under the rule of a star or constellation or any power of the powers above, as will yet be explained in the Torah. Now at the time of the first gift, Scripture states, Unto thy seed will I give, the verb being in a future tense, and similarly in the second time, because until then He had not given him the entire land, and therefore, He said to him, will I give it. But at the third time, during the covenant, He said, Unto thy seed have I given, meaning that He will make the covenant for the gift that He had already given him. Similarly, at the time of the circumcision, when He said, for a possession forever, He said to him, And I will give unto thee, in the future tense. Rashi wrote: Unto thy seed have I given. The word of the Supreme One is as if it were already accomplished. — But there is no need for this explanation in this passage.

OR HACHAIM

On that day G'd made a covenant with Abram. The reason that G'd used the past tense in referring to the gift of the land of Israel to Abraham and his descendants is that He had already made Abraham take possession of it, as we explained on 13,15. Abraham's children would henceforth own the land in their capacity as his heirs.

In view of this clear-cut promise of the Bible that the descendants of Abraham were to inherit the land of the ten nations mentioned, how could Jewish heretics delude themselves by denying that there is hope for us in the future, seeing that G'd's promise had already been fulfilled and we have forfeited it due to our sins?. [I believe the author refers to converts who accept the Christian theologians' views of Jewish history. Ed.] In view of the fact that we never possessed the land of all of these ten nations, the promise of the covenant has clearly not been fulfilled as yet. Up until now Israel only occupied the land belonging to seven of the ten nations listed here. We did not even possess all the land of those seven nations. How then can one understand the people of little faith [the author calls them the dried up bones describing the revelation in Ezekiel 37. Ed.] who have given up on our glorious messianic future? G'd treated us according to the principle of מדה כנגד מדה, that punishment must fit the crime. Seeing that we were supposed to be G'd's servants but rebelled in that we failed to observe many of His commandments, He caused those who were supposed to be our servants to rebel against us. This does not mean that G'd does not have the power to fulfil His covenant in full at the appropriate time.

The reason that the Torah first lists the nations whose territory we never captured, i.e. the Keyni, the Knizi and the Kadmoni, is that they are only different names for the Ammonites, the Moabites and the Edomites. When the time arrives when we will experience realisation of G'd's promise concerning those three nations, we will also again recapture the lands of the other seven nations listed here at the end. The Torah mentions those three first in order to teach us that the essential element of G'd's promise is that we will dispossess those three nations. The author sees an allusion of the future in Abraham's defeat of the four kings listed in 14,1. Three of them symbolise the Ammonites, Moabites and the Edomites. The last one (of those four), "Tidal king of גוים," represents the other seven nations. [The author seems to feel that the word גוים does not describe the name of a specific nation. Ed.]

16:2 *And Sarai said to Abram, "Look, the LORD has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a son through her." And Abram heeded Sarai's request.*

RAMBAN

AND ABRAM HEARKENED TO THE VOICE OF SARAI. Scripture does not state, "And he did so." Rather it says that he hearkened to the voice of Sarai, thus indicating that even though Abram was very desirous of having children, he did not do so without permission of Sarai. Even now it was not his intention to build up a family from Hagar, and that his children be from her. His intent was merely to do Sarai's will so that she may build a family from Hagar for she will find satisfaction in her handmaid's children, or that by the merit of this act she will become worthy to have children, as our Rabbis have said. Scripture further says, And Sarai took, to inform us that Abram did not hurry the matter until Sarai took Hagar and gave her to him. Again, Scripture mentions Sarai Abram's wife... to Abram her husband, to allude that Sarah did not despair of Abraham and that she did not render herself distant from him as she was his wife and he her husband, but she wanted that Hagar also be his wife. This is why the verse states, And she gave her to Abram her husband to be his wife, meaning that she was not to be as a concubine but as a woman married to him. All this reflects the ethical conduct of Sarah and her respect towards her husband.

16:3 *So Sarai, Abram's wife, took her maid, Hagar the Egyptian —after Abram had dwelt in the land of Canaan ten years— and gave her to her husband Abram as concubine.*

RAMBAN

AT THE END OF TEN YEARS. This is the established period for a woman who has lived with her husband for ten years without having given birth to children, after which he is bound to take another.

AFTER ABRAM DWELLED IN THE LAND OF CANAAN. This tells us that the period he dwelled outside of the Land is not to be included in the count of those ten years since he was not told And I will make of thee a great nation until after he had come to the land of Israel. Thus the language of Rashi. This reason is not proper since it is a clear-cut halachic decision that the time spent living outside the Land is not to be included in the ten year period for any person in the world. The Mishnah containing this principle applies to all men. And if it were as Rashi stated it, i.e., on account of this promise made to Abram, then for other people [the years they dwelled outside the land of Israel] should be included in the ten years period! Some Talmudic commentators have already made another mistake concerning this rule, stating that the law does not require a person who dwells outside the Land to divorce a woman with whom he has lived for ten years without her giving birth, nor does the law require him to marry another woman. But the matter is not so. Rather, the intent [of the law which excludes the period one dwells outside the land of Israel from the ten year total] is that if a man lived with his wife for five or ten years outside the

Land and then they came to the land of Israel, we give them a period of ten years from the time they came to the Land, for perhaps due to the merit of the Land they will build up a family. And thus did Abraham and Sarah our mother do from the time they came there.

16:5 *And Sarai said to Abram, "The wrong done me is your fault! I myself put my maid in your bosom; now that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her esteem. The LORD decide between you and me!"*

OR HACHAIM

Sarai said to Abram: "The wrong done me boomerangs on you. Why does the Torah present Sarah's complaint as if it were directed at Abraham when clearly she was angry at Hagar as she spelled out when she said that she had been downgraded in Hagar's eyes? If, on the other hand, she really targeted Hagar with her complaint, she did not seem to address the right target. After all, it was Sarah who had been slighted, her honour had been impugned not Avraham's. Furthermore, we must understand Avraham's reply. He appeared to have accepted Sarah's complaint when he said: "do what you will with Hagar!" If Avraham had not felt that he had a share of guilt in what happened he should have denied wrongdoing and not simply told Sarah what she could do.

In order to understand what transpired we must refer to Bereshit Rabbah 45,1 where it is explained that the status of the servant Hagar was one which obligated Avraham to look after her economic needs, whereas he was not entitled to sell her. Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish explains there that in return for supplying Hagar's needs, Avraham was entitled to consume (use, or own) the produce of her hands. This meant that wile Hagar was a bodily slave of Sarah, the proceeds of her labour belonged to Avraham. There is an argument in Ketuvot 79 whether the children born by women of such status belong to the mistress or to the husband. Those who hold that the infant belongs to the mistress base themselves on the principle that only one generation of "labour" belongs to the husband; when such "labours" have produced dividends in the form of children or animals, they certainly do not belong to the husband of the woman owning the slave. We have also learned in the name of Rav Ashi in Gittin 39 that when a male slave has married a free woman in the presence of his master, the master must free him. The Talmud explains that this is so when the master has arranged the marriage. The commentators there are at pains to explain that the master had presumably freed the male salve in question first, as it is unlikely that he would use force to marry somebody forbidden to him in Jewish law. The same ruling applies when the woman was the slave and the husband was a free man. In that case the master has to free the woman (first). Concerning this ruling the Maharik writes in Yoreh Deah item 246 in laws dealing with slaves, that if a master engages in sexual intercourse with his slave intending to marry her, this is equivalent to setting her free. If his intention was purely; carnal, however, this has no legal consequences, i.e. she is not freed. There is a disagreement between Rav Alfassi and Maimonides concerning the result of a master sleeping with his slave without declaring any intention either way. According to Rav Alfassi on Yevamot 82. such an encounter also brings in its wake the freeing of the slave, whereas Maimonides disagrees in chapter 9 of the laws about slaves. After having explained all this, we can now return to the issue at hand.

When Sarah noticed that Hagar exploited her pregnancy to belittle her she became angry at the very idea that a slave should belittle her mistress. There is every reason to believe that Abraham could not have been unaware of Hagar's conduct. Our verse need not be understood as if Sarah had only now brought this to her husband's attention. Our verse reflects Sarah's anger that her husband had not reacted sooner to the slights she experienced at the hands of Hagar. When Abraham slept with Hagar in order to establish a man-wife relationship, Hagar in effect had become a free woman legally, as we have demonstrated from the rulings quoted. When Hagar assumed haughty airs it was because she no longer viewed herself as a slave. Sarah blamed her husband for enabling Hagar to have attained the status of a free person. She did not express anger at Hagar, seeing that Hagar was correct in no longer viewing herself as subservient to Sarah.

Sarah now challenged Hagar's new found legal status. She did this by emphasising that it was she who had initiated the union between Hagar and Abraham, not Abraham. She had given Hagar to Abraham inasmuch as she could dispose of the activities of her slave Hagar. Why would the Torah repeat ("I have given my slave to your bosom") something we knew already, except to stress the conditions under which Hagar had been given to Abraham? According to what we have explained earlier Abraham had no claim to the fruit of Hagar's womb. Any child of Hagar's would belong to Sarah, her mistress. Hagar had never been Abraham's slave so that he could have freed her. Hagar could only have been freed if her mistress had not given her to Abraham as a slave, or even specifically as a wife and we would fall back on the argument that Abraham would not consort with a harlot and that therefore even if he had not promised freedom to Hagar it was implied by his sleeping with her. All of this would apply only if Hagar had at that time been Abraham's slave, not when she was Sarah's slave. Sarah claimed that she had been very careful at the time she suggested that Abraham sleep with Hagar. She said (verse 2): "please sleep with my slave." She had given Abraham notice that Hagar would remain her slave also after he had slept with her. Had Sarah not had such an intention, she would simply have said to Abraham: "sleep with Hagar!"

I have found an explanation of the words: "she (Sarah) gave her to her husband to become his wife." Bereshit Rabbah 45,3 states that the words "to Abraham as a wife" were meant as "to him exclusively, not to anyone else." Our sages also deal with the extraneous word אישה, "her husband," in verse three. Did we not know that Abraham was Sarah's husband? They say the word is an exclusion, i.e. Sarah insisted that in spite of Hagar sleeping with Abraham, he would remain a husband only to her! These words make excellent sense in the context of our approach to the whole episode. The Torah had to add this word so that we would understand that Hagar's status as a slave did not change as a result of her sleeping with Abraham. Abraham could neither release Hagar to someone else nor even free her.

Hearing Sarah's words, Abraham concurred with her. This can be understood on two levels. 1) Abraham had never intended that Hagar's status should change as a result of the new arrangements; nonetheless he did not consider himself as a קדש, male prostitute, when he slept with her. 2) Originally, Abraham thought that Hagar became free as a result of his sleeping with her as a legal arrangement. He had not paid attention to the finer nuances of Sarah's words when she offered, or pressed,

Hagar on him as a sleeping partner. Had he understood Sarah correctly he might not have agreed to sleep with Hagar at all, worrying that his sleeping with her would stamp him as a קדש, male prostitute. This may well be the reason why during the fourteen years that elapsed between the birth of Ishmael and that of Isaac we never hear that Abraham slept with Hagar again.

The simplest approach to the whole problem is, of course, that as the Torah had not been given as yet, the various halachic wrinkles we have discussed did not enter the picture. The fact that Abraham and Sarah already observed the Torah's commandments of their own free will did not mean that on occasion, and in order to help fulfil some prophecy, they would not transgress laws temporarily. [Did not Jacob marry two sisters during their lifetime? Ed.] Maimonides already stated in chapter nine of Yesodey Torah in Sefer Hamada that when a properly accredited prophet asks the Jews to violate one of the 613 commandments on a temporary basis that one should obey him. He cites the example of the prophet Elijah who rebuilt a private altar at a time when such altars were prohibited (Kings 1 18). Seeing that Sarah was a greater prophetess than he (Shemot Rabbah 1, based on Genesis 21,12), Abraham complied with her suggestion. It was necessary for matters to develop in this manner so that the residue of the original serpent's poison, some of which was still lodged within Abraham, could be expelled with the sperm which impregnated Hagar. When Abraham would eventually father Isaac, this would be from sperm that was no longer contaminated by the זוהמה, spiritual poison, of the original serpent. Had Hagar become a free woman, not only would she not have absorbed the entire spiritual contamination that was still lodged within Abraham, but the fact that Isaac would have been born with some of it could have caused untold harm to the future of the Jewish people. Sarah insisted that Hagar remain a slave because of such considerations. How else could we explain that Sarah would allow Abraham to make a קדש, male prostitute, of himself by sleeping with her slave? The reason she invited G'd to judge between them was because only G'd knew her true motives.

As soon as Sarah heard that Abraham did not doubt her pure motives and that he did not say anything when she not only treated Hagar as a slave, but more demonstratively than previously, Hagar took the hint and fled that household. Hagar did not accept the decision that reduced her again to the status of a slave. She had never heard the condition Sarah made at the time she gave her to Abraham to cohabit with. When the angel called to Hagar (16,8), he addressed her as שפחת שרה, "the slave-woman of Sarah," to make it clear that she had not been entitled to leave Sarah and Abraham's household in what she thought of as her new status as a free woman. Hagar immediately accepted the angel's rebuke by saying "I flee from my mistress Sarah."

We must explore the legal status of Hagar's son Ishmael. Is he (and his offspring) subservient to us inasmuch as he was the son of a Jewish owned slave? There is a Beraitha in Torat Kohanim 87 on פרשת בהר on the subject: Whence do we know that if a Jewish male fathered a son with a Gentile slave that this son is a slave of his? The words אשר יהיו לך מאת הגוים אשר סביבותיכם in Leviticus 25,44 are considered as the source of this ruling. This verse only ruled out slaves who lived in the land of Canaan at the time the Jewish people conquered that land. The words "who will be yours" were quite unnecessary. Normally, the Torah would have used an expression such as "whom you will purchase," or something similar. For this reason the author of the Beraitha understands the words as referring to as yet unborn children of a Gentile slave sired by a Jewish male. The law that remaining Canaanites had to be killed applied only to those who were already alive and in the land of Canaan at the time the Torah was given (Deut. 20,17). As a result of this ruling it emerges that Ishmael and all his offspring are truly slaves of the Jewsih people (legally speaking). There is no need to enter into the discussion we have described on page 149. Regardless of whether we view ourselves as Sarah's or as Abraham's heirs, Ishmael and offspring are included in our inheritance. Abraham inherited Sarah upon her death. He made Isaac his sole heir. G'd renewed the covenant with us the Jewish people to give us the lands He promised to Abraham. That land includes all the parts inhabited by Edom as well as the part of Esau shared with Ishmael's offspring.

The most convincing proof that we are correct is found in Genesis 21,13 where G'd promises that the son of the slave-woman (Hagar) will develop into a nation. It is important to note that the Torah does not refer to Ishmael as Abraham's son but as Hagar's son. Thus the Torah emphasises that Ishmael remains a slave, seeing that he is the son of a slave. If you wanted to see further proof of this look at the way the Torah describes the sons of Zilpah i.e. Leah's slave-woman, and the sons of Bilhah, i.e. Rachel's slave-woman. You will observe that when the Torah described those women giving birth (Genesis 30,5) that the sons are attributed to Jacob, not to their respective mothers. This means that because Jacob slept with them in order to establish a legal bond they became free women. In the reports of the births of all the four sons of Zilpah and Bilhah the Torah was careful to emphasise this point, (compare 30,7; 30,10; 30,12) In our case the Torah empahasises the difference in status between Ishmael and Isaac once more when we read: "for through Isaac your seed will be known" (Genesis 21,12) i.e. not through Ishmael.

There was no need to promise to give us the lands of Ishmael since a slave does not own land and whatever land he lived on belonged to the Jewish people, his owner.

16:6 *Abram said to Sarai, "Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right." Then Sarai treated her harshly, and she ran away from her.*

RAMBAN

AND SARAI DEALT HARSHLY WITH HER, AND SHE FLED FROM BEFORE HER FACE. Our mother did transgress by this affliction, and Abraham also by his permitting her to do so. And so, G-d heard her [Hagar's] affliction and gave her a son who would be a wild-ass of a man, to afflict the seed of Abraham and Sarah with all kinds of affliction.

16:9 *And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Go back to your mistress, and submit to her harsh treatment."*

RAMBAN

RETURN TO THY MISTRESS, AND SUBMIT THYSELF UNDER HER HANDS. The angel commanded her to return and accept upon herself the authority of her mistress. This implies that she will not go out free from her, as Sarah's children will ever rule over her children.

16:11 *The angel of the LORD said to her further, "Behold, you are with child And shall bear a son; You shall call him Ishmael, For the LORD has paid heed to your suffering.*

RAMBAN

AND THOU SHALT CALL HIS NAME ISHMAEL. The angel informed Hagar that his name will be Ishmael — just as in the verse, Behold, a son shall be born unto the house of David Josiah by name — and he told her that she should so call him, and thus remember that G-d heard her affliction. Now Abraham either called him by this name on his own, with the intent that G-d hear him and answer him, or the Holy Spirit rested upon him, as Rashi has it, and he called him Ishmael because G-d had heard his mother's affliction, as the angel had said. The correct interpretation appears to me to be that the angel commanded Hagar that she call him so, but she, being a concubine, was afraid to give a name to her master's son, so she revealed the matter to him, and Abram fulfilled the word of G-d. Scripture, however, did not need to delve at length into this matter.

16:12 *He shall be a wild ass of a man; His hand against everyone, And everyone's hand against him; He shall dwell alongside of all his kinsmen."*

RAMBAN

'PERE ADAM.' Rashi comments: "One who loves the deserts [and] to hunt wild animals, as it is written, And he dwelt in the wilderness and became an archer. His hand shall be against every man. This means that he will be a highway man. And every man's hand against him. Everyone will hate him and attack him." The correct interpretation is that pere adam is a construct form, meaning that he will be a wild-ass man accustomed to the wilderness, going forth to his work, seeking for food, devouring all and being devoured by all. The subject pertains to his children who will increase, and they will have wars with all the nations. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said: "His hand shall be against every man in that he will be victorious at first over all nations, and afterwards, every man's hand shall be against him, meaning that he will be vanquished in the end. And in the face of all his brethren, who are the sons of Keturah, he should dwell, meaning that Ishmael's children will outnumber those of Keturah."

17:1 *When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai. Walk in My ways and be blameless.*

RAMBAN

'E-IL SHA-DAI.' These are two distinct Divine names, each one descriptive in itself. Now the meaning of the word eil is "mighty", derived from the expression, Eilei Moab (the mighty ones of Moab). The meaning of Sha—dai, according to Rashi, is "He whose G-dship suffices for every creature." In the book Moreh Nebuchim the Rabbi explained that the name Sha—dai signifies "he who is sufficient." That is to say, He does not require the existence of what He created or the conservation of any other being; rather, His existence is self-sufficient. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra explained in the name of the Nagid that the name is from the root shodeid, meaning "victor and prevailer over the hosts of heaven." This is the correct interpretation, for the name Sha—dai represents the attribute of power which conducts the world, concerning which the Sages have said that it is "the attribute of Justice of the world below." The reason for mentioning this Divine Name now is that with it are done the hidden miracles for the righteous, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine, as well as to redeem them in war from the power of the sword, just as all the miracles done to Abraham and to the other patriarchs, and as all the blessings and curses mentioned in the Torah in the section Im Bechukothai and in the section Vehaya Ki Thavo. These blessings and curses are all miracles for it is not in nature that the rains should come in their due season when we worship G-d, nor are the skies to be like iron if we plant our fields in the seventh year, and similarly all promises in the Torah. Rather, they are all miracles by which the disposition of natural law is overpowered, except that no change from the natural order of the world is noticeable, as was the case with the miracles done through Mosheh Rabbeinu with the ten plagues, the dividing of the Sea, the Manna, the well, and their like, for these are miracles which openly changed nature, and they were done with the Tetragrammaton which He told to him. It is for this reason that He now told Abraham our father that He is the Almighty, the Victor Who will prevail over his constellation of birth so that he will have a son, and thus there will be a covenant between Him and his seed forever, meaning that the portion of the Eternal is His people, and that He will lead them at His own will, as they will not be under the rule of a star or constellation. Know and consider that our father Abraham did not mention the Tetragrammaton [Eternal] in any of his utterances except in combination with the Divine Name written [G-d], or in combination with E-il Elyon [G-d Most High], but he did mention in his affairs the name Elokim [G-d]. Thus he will say, The Eternal, the G-d of heaven. He said, however, the Eternal seeth, because it refers to the place of the future Sanctuary. Jacob, on the other hand, always mentioned E-il Sha-dai [G-d Almighty], which Moses our teacher never mentions. If you will be worthy you will understand this entire matter from that which the Rabbis said in Tractate Yebamoth: "All prophets contemplated Deity through an unlucid speculum," which is why Isaiah said, And I saw G-d, [i.e., the Divine Name written Aleph Dalet]. "But Moses contemplated Deity through a lucid speculum." This is why He said, For a man shall not see Me and live, whereas Isaiah's verse, and I saw G-d, is written with the Aleph Dalet. I will mention this theme again in Parshath Va'eira if G-d will look upon my grief.

WALK BEFORE ME. i.e., by following the path which I will show you. [This command is similar in] meaning to the verse, After the Eternal G-d shall ye walk, and Him shall ye fear, except that with respect to a general command to follow His way which precedes His specific instructions, He says, Walk before Me, while with respect to a command which follows the specific command, He says, After the Eternal ye shall walk. The purport of both commands is to walk after G-d, fear Him alone and do whatever He commands.

AND BE THOU WHOLE-HEARTED. This is an additional commandment in this matter, similar in meaning to the verse, Thou shalt be whole-hearted with the Eternal thy G-d, which follows G-d's admonition: There shall not be found among you any one that ... useth divination, a soothsayer, or an enchanter, or sorcerer, etc. The purport of both verses is that one should believe in his heart that the Holy One, blessed be He, alone is the Omnipotent from beginning to end. It is He who has the power to do and to undo, and therefore he should not listen to

the soothsayers and diviners or to the enchanters and the sorcerers. He shall in no way believe that their words shall be fulfilled, but he should decree in his heart that everything is in the hand of the Supreme One, who is G-d, G-d Almighty, Who doeth a person good, which was not predestined by his constellation, and bringeth evil upon him despite a constellation that was good and auspicious. In accordance with the manner in which a man walks before Him, He frustrateth the tokens of the impostors, and maketh diviners mad. It is this which the Sages had in mind when they said: "[G-d said to Abraham], 'Go forth from your astrological speculations, etc.'" Now Rashi explained: "And be thou whole-hearted. Be whole-hearted in all the trials I impose upon you." And Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said that the verse means that he should not seek the reason for the commandment of circumcision, it being similar in meaning to the verse: Let my heart be undivided in Thy statutes, in order that I may not be put to shame. The correct interpretation is as I have explained.

17:3 *Abram threw himself on his face; and God spoke to him further,*

RAMBAN

AND ABRAM FELL ON HIS FACE. The purpose of this expression was to direct his mind towards the prophecy. When the prophecy concerning the commandment of circumcision was completed, Abraham rose and stood. When the word from heaven came to him a second time, saying to him, As for Sarai thy wife, etc., he once again fell on his face to direct his mind towards the prophecy, and he also prayed concerning Ishmael. in line with the verses: And they fell upon their faces, and said, O G-d, the G-d of the spirits, etc.; That I may consume them in a moment. And they fell upon their faces.

17:4 *"As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You shall be the father of a multitude of nations.*

RAMBAN

BEHOLD, MY COVENANT IS WITH THEE, AND THOU SHALT BE THE FATHER OF A MULTITUDE OF NATIONS. This refers to the covenant of the circumcision, as He will explain, "This is the sign of the Covenant, and after the covenant you will be the father of a multitude of nations." Blessed be the Lord! By Him alone are actions weighed, for He preceded and commanded Abraham to enter into His covenant to be circumcised before Sarah became pregnant so that his seed would be holy.

17:5 *And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I make you the father of a multitude of nations.*

OR HACHAIM

your name will no longer be Abram, but Abraham. Bereshit Rabbah 44,10 already stated that when Abram cited that he had seen in his horoscope that he would not father any children, G'd agreed with him and told him that he was correct, that as Abram he would not father children but that as Abraham he would. The same would apply to Sarai as compared to Sarah. This Midrash is very difficult since the Torah reports Abram as siring Ishmael, not Abraham!

Besides, why did the Midrash mention that Sarai did not bear children when Abraham had never even raised the problem of Sarai not having children?

We must conclude therefore that Abraham already knew at that time or at least surmised that any meaningful seed of his could only be conceived through Sarah because (presumably) whatever he had foreseen in his horoscope applied to himself in conjunction with his wife. G'd confirmed this when He told him that his seed would be known through Isaac. This is why the Midrash included the name Sarah when describing a prophecy primarily directed at Abraham. Abraham realised that the need for Ishmael to be his son was to rid his sperm of any residual contamination of the original serpent. Fathering Ishmael then was not fathering in the true sense of the word.

17:6 *I will make you exceedingly fertile, and make nations of you; and kings shall come forth from you.*

RAMBAN

AND I WILL MAKE NATIONS OF THEE. The language of Rashi: "Israel and Edom are referred to here, for Ishmael was already born to him, and He could not therefore have been making any announcement concerning him." But in my opinion it is not correct that He should inform him of Esau at the time of the covenant of circumcision since Esau does not observe circumcision and has not been commanded thereon, as the Sages expounded in Tractate Sanhedrin: "For in Isaac shall seed be called to thee, but not all of Isaac." Instead, [the proper interpretation is that] Israel alone is called "nations" and "peoples," as in the verses: Yea, He loveth the peoples; They shall call peoples unto the mountains; After thee, Benjamin, among the peoples. Even after the birth of all the tribes, He said: A nation and a company of nations shall be of thee; And I will make of thee a company of peoples.

שביעי SEVENTH ALIYAH

17:9 *God further said to Abraham, "As for you, you and your offspring to come throughout the ages shall keep My covenant.*

RAMBAN

'VE'ATAH' (AND AS FOR THEE), THOU SHALT KEEP MY COVENANT. Rashi commented, "The vav of ve'atah connects the verse with the preceding matter [in Verse 4]: 'As for Me behold My covenant is with thee, and as for thee, thou shalt be careful to keep it.' And what constitutes this 'keeping' of it? This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you — this applies to those who were then alive; and thy seed after thee — this applies to those who are yet to be born." The Rabbi is correct in his interpretation of the plain meaning of the verse. Now they have said concerning the reason for the commandment of circumcision that He has thereby placed a reminder in the organ of lust, which is the source of much trouble and sin, in order that it should not be used excepting where it is commandatory and permissible. By way of truth, the meaning of the verse, Behold, My covenant is with thee, is similar in meaning to the verses: Behold, I am with thee; And He said, Certainly, I will be with thee; The Eternal our G-d be with us. He is thus saying that the covenant will be with him, and therefore he will be fruitful and multiply. After that He commanded that Abraham keep this covenant, and the circumcision will be as a

sign of the covenant. Thus it is that this "sign" is as "the sign" of the Sabbath, and therefore circumcision sets aside the Sabbath. Understand this.

17:14 *And if any male who is uncircumcised fails to circumcise the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his kin; he has broken My covenant."*

RAMBAN

AND THE UNCIRCUMCISED MALE. Here Scripture teaches you that this circumcision must be at the location where the distinction between male and female is evident. Thus the words of Rashi. Our Rabbis have likewise mentioned other reasons. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said: "his foreskin, which is known, for it is in the genital organ. But not so are the expressions: uncircumcised in the heart; uncircumcised lips; their ear is uncircumcised. All of these latter are in a construct state. In my opinion the matter is clearly explained in Scripture. It does not say, "And ye shall circumcise your foreskin," thus leaving the meaning in doubt, nor does it say, "the foreskin of your flesh," just as it says the foreskin of your heart, and "the foreskin of your lips." But instead it says, And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, meaning that you are to cut off the flesh which is your foreskin, namely, your flesh which obstructs, and there is no flesh in the body which obstructs and covers a limb [as is the case with the genital organ], where one can cut the flesh and remain without the foreskin, other than the "flesh that covers the corona," which the Sages mentioned. The word "flesh" in the expression, uncircumcised in flesh, is a euphemism for the genital organ, just as in the verses great of flesh, and an issue of his flesh.

17:17 *Abraham threw himself on his face and laughed, as he said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old, or can Sarah bear a child at ninety?"*

RAMBAN

'VAYITZCHAK' (AND HE LAUGHED). Onkelos translated: "and he rejoiced." This is correct since the word tzachak can be used intermittently for sporting or rejoicing, just as in the verses: 'Mesacheketh' (Sporting) in His habitable earth, 'mesachkim' (rejoiced) before the Eternal. In my opinion the intent of this expression is to convey the thought that whoever sees a favorable unusual event in one's life rejoices to the point where "his mouth is filled with laughter." It is this thought which Sarah expressed: G-d hath made laughter for me; everyone that heareth will laugh on account of me, just as in the verse, Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. And this is what Abraham did. When this good tiding was related to him, he rejoiced and his mouth was filled with laughter, and he said in his heart that this is an occasion for rejoicing as it is a very wonderful matter. Shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? And will this matter not give cause for rejoicing and happiness? Only, Scripture speaks summarily of his wonderment, as it is connected with the word vayitzchak. A similar case is the expression, Have I even here seen, which is connected with the beginning of the verse: for she [Hagar] said, "Have I even here seen G-d, revealing to me that He saw in my affliction, and shall I not call Him E-il-ro'i [the G-d who seeth me]?" Another such example is the expression, Did I reveal Myself unto the house of thy father, which is connected with the following verse, Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at Mine offering, thus stating, "Have I chosen you so that you kick at My sacrifice and Mine offering? Why then do you do so?" It may be that the question, Shall a child be born to him that is a hundred years old? is an expression of amazement, not one of impossibility, just as in the verse, Wilt thou judge the bloody city, which means, "Do you want to judge her and cause her to know all her abominations?" A similar case is the verse, Wilt thou set thine eyes upon it? it is gone. Likewise is the verse, Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat? That is to say, "Has the thought occurred to you to eat of the tree?" This verse likewise is saying, "Has the thought occurred to anyone that a child be born to him that is a hundred years old, and that Sarah, who is ninety years, shall bear?" After that Abraham said to Him that he wishes this miracle be with the life of Ishmael.

SHALL A CHILD BE BORN TO HIM THAT IS A HUNDRED YEARS OLD? There is no wonder that a person who is a hundred years old should beget children, for men beget as long as they have vigor even if they be ninety years old or a hundred years old, even in these generations. All the more in the days of Abraham, who had not yet lived two thirds of his life. Moreover, forty years after this, he begot many children from Keturah. But Abraham's saying, Shall a child be born to him that is a hundred years old, expressed this thought: Since he did not beget a child from this woman while he was young, how could he beget from her after he was a hundred and she ninety? He knew that her womanly periods had ceased. Therefore Abraham did not say so originally when he was told, And I will make nations of thee, but only when he was told that he would beget a child from Sarah. Now He commanded him, And thou shalt call his name Isaac, on account of the rejoicing done by Abraham, which is proof that it was out of faith and joy [that Abraham said, Shall a child be born, etc.] And after Abraham called him so, as G-d had commanded him, Sarah said, "Is he not rightly named Isaac? For G-d hath made laughter for me."

17:18 *And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live by Your favor!"*

RAMBAN

'LU' (O) THAT ISHMAEL MIGHT LIVE BEFORE THEE. The meaning of this word lu everywhere is as the word im (if), and it is also found combined in the word lulei, which means "if not." [The Hebrew word lulei, ordinarily written with a yud at the end] is sometimes written with an aleph at the end. It is also combined into the form of ilu, as in the verses: 'Ve'ilu' (But if) we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen; 'Ve'ilu' (And if) a thousand years twice told. The purport of this word ilu is "even if," and its meaning is as if it said, "if if," the double use of the word being for the purpose of emphasis, as in the expressions: Is it only through Moses alone; Was it because there were no graves; and other similar cases. Abraham thus said: "If Ishmael live before Thee, I will be pleased with this blessing with which Thou hast blessed me, namely, with seed from Sarah." For since He promised him at first, One born of your own body is to be your heir, and the heir was to be one person, he [Abraham] had thought that this referred to Ishmael. But now that he was told that he will beget a child from Sarah and he understood that this child was to be the heir, he feared lest Ishmael die. Therefore, he said this: [O that Ishmael might live before Thee]. Live before Thee. Rashi explained: "Live in reverence of Thee, similar in meaning to Walk before Me, which Onkelos

renders, 'Worship Me.'" But this is not correct, since He said, And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee. Instead, its meaning is that he live and his seed will always exist.

OR HACHAIM

...לו ישמעאל יחיה לפניך. Abraham said.... "if only Ishmael will live (a righteous life) before You. Abraham prayed that Ishmael should enjoy divine assistance to live as a righteous person. The term "to live before You" is the source for the righteous being called "alive" in our rabbinic literature. Abraham "borrowed" a phrase from Deut. 4,11 where the Torah describes the fact that the Jewish people were "alive" at that time as due to their having cleaved to G'd. Abraham saw the need to pray for this as he had observed negative character tendencies in Ishmael (who was still a minor). Had Ishmael been truly wicked at that time, Abraham, though prejudiced as his father, would have been aware of such wickedness, just as any other righteous person could perceive such things. We have explained in connection with 15,2-3 that Abraham had worried about a son of his not being worthy because G'd described his seeds as comparable to dust. At this point Abraham prayed that Ishmael would turn out to be worthy.

17:19 *God said, "Nevertheless, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac; and I will maintain My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring to come.*

RAMBAN

'AVAL' SARAH THY WIFE. This is like the verse, "Aval" she has no son, the word aval meaning "only." He thus said: "Only the son of whom I informed you, your wife Sarah will give birth to, and with him will I establish My covenant forever and with his seed after him; and Ishmael I will bless by making his children numerous, but this will not be because of My covenant with him."

OR HACHAIM

G'd said: "But your wife Sarah will bear a son for you. Why did G'd add the word "but?"

G'd may have wanted to explain to Abraham that if the gift of a son was something intended only for Abraham, it would suffice to grant his prayer and assist Ishmael to become worthy. However, there was another person to be considered, his wife Sarah. Inasmuch as Sarah was destined to bear a son, he, Abraham, had no right to waive the gift of a son by Sarah in order for Ishmael to grow up worthy of his father. The Torah was very particular using the word לך, "for you," in connection with the son Sarah would bear. She would bear this son in answer to her prayer.

It is also possible that the Torah here hinted at G'd's displeasure that Abraham was satisfied with Ishmael, someone who contained residual poisonous material from the original serpent. Had it not been for Abraham's prayer regarding the future of Ishmael, his son Isaac might not have originated in what kabbalists know as the סטרא דנוקבא, an emanation on the left and female side of the emanations. Had Isaac originated in the other side of the emanations he might never have fathered an Esau. This matter had ramifications at the time of the עקדה, when Isaac received the soul who would bear children for him, i.e. the moment at which Rebeccah his life-partner was born.

17:20 *As for Ishmael, I have heeded you. I hereby bless him. I will make him fertile and exceedingly numerous. He shall be the father of twelve chieftains, and I will make of him a great nation.*

OR HACHAIM

Concerning (your prayer for) Ishmael, I have listened to you, etc. Inasmuch as the only reason Abraham had prayed for Ishmael was because he was at that time his only son, and he had not prayed for him again after Sarah had born Isaac, G'd listened to his prayer. We can understand this according to the principle postulated in Makkot 11 that even the conditional curse of a Torah scholar comes true. We have another principle that a blessing is much stronger than a curse, i.e. has far wider ramifications. G'd told Abraham that Ishmael would eventually become a בעל תשובה since Abraham had prayed for Ishmael to develop into a G'd-fearing person. This is the meaning of G'd's words: "Here I have blessed him." G'd used the past tense to hint that when He promised that Abraham would die in a ripe old age, He had already made provisions for Ishmael's conduct not to cloud Abraham's departure from this earth.

17:22 *And when He was done speaking with him, God was gone from Abraham.*

RAMBAN

AND G-D WENT UP FROM ABRAHAM. This is an expression of respect towards G-d, and we learn from it that the righteous are the Chariot of the Holy One, blessed be He. Thus the language of Rashi. But the saying of the Sages in the Bereshith Rabbah is: "It is the patriarchs that constitute the Chariot." This is an allusion to that which is written: Thou wilt give truth to Jacob, kindness to Abraham; And the Fear of Isaac had been on my side. The student learned [in the mysteries of the Torah] will understand.

17:23 *Then Abraham took his son Ishmael, and all his homeborn slaves and all those he had bought, every male in Abraham's household, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins on that very day, as God had spoken to him.*

OR HACHAIM

Abraham took his son Ishmael, etc. Inasmuch as Ishmael had attained maturity, (he was 13 years of age) Abraham had "to take him," i.e. convince him, not merely order him to submit. The same applied to all the other members of his household who were no longer minors. Abraham was anxious that G'd's commandment to become circumcised would be accepted willingly.

as G'd had told him to. We need to know why the Torah added these last few words. After all, anyone who reads the passage is aware that this is exactly what Abraham did. Perhaps the Torah wanted to tell us that the efforts Abraham made to have all the people concerned be circumcised willingly was what G'd had told him to do.

Possibly, the Torah testified to the fact that Abraham complied with G'd's instructions immediately, without any delay. The Torah credited Abraham with the manner in which he related to any of G'd's demands upon him.

Avodah Zarah 27 understands the repetition of המול ימול in 17,13 to mean that he who circumcises others must himself first have been circumcised. Perhaps this is what is meant by the words: "as He commanded him to do," i.e. Abraham circumcised himself first before he circumcised anyone else. If we accept this explanation we do no longer have to search for a reason why the Torah did not specifically mention that Abraham circumcised himself. There were two reasons why it is assumed that Abraham was the first to circumcise himself. 1) It was his nature to comply with any commandment of G'd immediately. Besides, how could he have persuaded others to do something he himself appeared to be afraid of doing? 2) In order for his circumcision of the members of his household to be halachically valid, he himself had to be circumcised first.

When the Torah told us in verse 24 that Abraham was circumcised, this concerned only the time element. The Torah wanted us to know that just as Ishmael allowed imself to be circumcised at 13 years of age, so Abraham was 99 years of age. [The letter ו in the word ואברהם in that verse was necessary because it interrupts the story of Ishmael's circumcision. The Torah wanted to mention Abraham's circumcision before that of Ishmael; this is why it had to insert verse 24. Ed.]

מפטיר MAFTIR

17:26 *Thus Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised on that very day;*

RAMBAN

IN THE SELFSAME DAY WAS ABRAHAM CIRCUMCISED. Rashi wrote: "In the selfsame day when Abraham completed his ninety-ninth year and Ishmael his thirteenth, they were circumcised." But what reason is there to mention this? Moreover, there is already general agreement with the words of Rabbi Eliezer who said that in the month of Tishri the world was created, and in Tishri the patriarchs were born, with the exception of Isaac who was born on Passover. Now Scripture says that the birth of Isaac will be at this time in the next year, and Rashi himself wrote further on in Seder Vayeira that the tidings were given on Passover. Consequently, Isaac was born on the next Passover! Instead, the expression, In the selfsame day, means that on the very day he was charged with this commandment, he and the men of his house — three hundred and eighteen — and all those purchased with his money were circumcised. Scripture thus tells of Abraham's distinction with respect to the fear of G-d, as well as that of all the men of his house, i.e., that they were all zealous, fulfilling their religious duty as promptly as possible. Now the meaning of the phrase, was Abraham circumcised and Ishmael his son, is not that Abraham was circumcised first. Instead, it was Ishmael who was circumcised first, and then all the men of Abraham's house, for it is so written: And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and after that it says, And Abraham was ninety years and nine when he was circumcised. The reason for this was that Abraham was zealous concerning the commandment to circumcise them first, either doing it himself or perhaps inviting many circumcisers whom he supervised, and then he circumcised himself. Had he performed his circumcision first, he would have been sick or in danger on account of his advanced age, and he would then not have been in a position to concern himself with their circumcision. Vayeira