The exodus from Babel continues

Abraham's monotheism vs Babelian supremacism resurfaces

By GOL KALEV

At three different times after the flood, God tells humanity "*Lech Lecha*" ("Go forth!"): "multiply upon the earth," "replenish the earth," "swarm the earth." But humanity defies God's orders and does the exact opposite: They build a city, so "we would not be scattered on the face of the whole earth."

One man does hear God's "Lech Lecha." Biblical interpreters claim that Abraham came from a place called Ur Kasdim and heard a call that was uniquely directed to him. But can Ur Kasdim be Babel? And can Abraham simply have heard God's repeated call of Lech Lecha that was directed to all of humanity?

We know that the exodus from Babel occurred at Peleg's time and we can calculate that Abraham was born during Peleg's life. Kasdim is a name used later in the bible for Babylonians. Also we can derive the magnanimous nature of Ur Kasdim from God's own words: "I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur Kasdim, to give thee this land to inherit it."

We can also ascertain that the abandonment of the "fleshpots of Babel" extracts a heavy price: Abraham's family was plagued with shorter lifespans and fertility problems. After all, Babel was the world. Why would anybody want to leave it?

Did Abraham hear what others failed to hear? This depends on one's view about the prophecy spectrum. Is a prophet someone who has a dedicated line of communication with God? Or someone who hears what others do not? Is it about information-gathering or about information-analysis?

Theodor Herzl hinted at his own view on this matter a number of times, including during the 1903 Uganda debate. Accused of abandoning that same land promised to Abraham's seed in favor of Jewish settlement in Africa, he was attacked: "Where is the Land of Israel in the British proposal [of Uganda]?" He answered: "The charter to the Land of Israel is written on the official British documents in invisible ink." Herzl assured that if they follow his lead, the ink will then be visible to all (source: Isaiah Friedman, *Germany, Turkey and Zionism 1897-1918*).

Indeed, those who were able to see the invisible ink understood the magnitude of the British Uganda proposal: It gave Zionism official recognition and ingrained the Zionist idea within the British government's operates. Sure enough, 14 years later, the British issued the Balfour Declaration.

Abraham, like Herzl, read the invisible ink that others could not: He rebelled against Babelian universalism and set course toward the Promised Land. Canaan, who was slated to be "servants unto his brethren," possibly served as the necessary "advance team," clearing the terrain and ridding it of animals. A few decades after the exodus from Babel, the world seemed to have been at peace and Abraham was spreading his monotheistic doctrine.

But not everybody accepted the principles of the Abrahamic revolution. Five kings from the Babel area demanded that the "colonies" serve them ("pay taxes") – a potent display of Babelian supremacism. After all, all of humanity came from Babel.

Abraham's nephew Lot possibly spread the ideas of the Abrahamic revolution to the Sodom region after he moved there. And indeed, after 12 years of serving the five kings, those "colonies" rebelled ("no taxation without representation"). The five kings retaliated with war, crushed the rebels and captured Lot.

Abraham then intervened, delivering a fatal blow to the five kings. His victory was not only a rescue operation for Lot. It was a rescue operation for his monotheistic revolution!

Those events set the stage for the defining conflict of the biblical era: Abraham's Lech Lecha vs Babel supremacism, monotheism vs paganism. Indeed, about a thousand years after Abraham, Babel (Babylon) destroyed Jerusalem. But roughly 1,500 years afterwards, the Abrahamic doctrine prevailed: Europeans accepted monotheism in the form of Christianity and Middle Easterners in the form of Islam. End of history? Not yet: About a thousand years after that, starting in the 18th century, the old biblical conflict was set to resume with the stunning rise of European atheism.

This coincided with the rapid ascent of European supremacism, seeking not only to tax "its" colonies, but also to aggressively impose European values on non-Europeans: universalism, secularism, denationalism – in short, Babelism.

This divide is perhaps best depicted in a 2020 duality: US President-elect Joe Biden's call for Americans to "spread the faith" vs French President Emmanuel Macron's act of European supremacism at Jerusalem's Church of Saint Anne, contemptuously claiming it based on colonialist-era arrangements (religion vs sacrilege).

And so, as the debate over Abraham's exodus from Babel resumes, it is incumbent upon us to try to read that invisible ink that leads to the Promised Land. ■

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Parasha picture

'And the Lord said unto her: Two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger' (Genesis 25:23)

Toldot, Genesis 25:19-28:9, is read on November 21.
Illustrative photo: Israel Weiss (weisssi.weiss@gmail.com) www.facebook.com/israel.weiss.10

The Sodom setback

Something awfully wrong happened when Sodom was demolished. First, it appears Sodom's destruction caught Abraham by surprise. The day before, he negotiated the threshold with God, likely with the intention of saving Lot – there must be 10, if not 50 righteous in Lot's camp. The angels determined there are not and destroyed Sodom.

We know the carnage traveled up through Zoar into the mountains, which possibly prompted Abraham to escape to Gerar. We can speculate that Abraham was surprised since he made no advance security arrangements with Gerar. As he approached Gerar, fearing for his life, Abraham resorted to the good old trick of claiming that his wife, Sarah, is his sister. This was based on his conclusion that Gerar is not God-fearing. How could this be? Abraham's defeat of the five kings created a pro-monotheistic environment. What could have set it back?

The answer might be embedded in the second thing that went awfully wrong that night. Our monotheistic narrative is that Sodom was destroyed by God. But is that also the other side's narrative?

The people of Sodom were told that night that the city would be destroyed. But as the angels began the process, Lot repeatedly stalled and then asked to abort the mission, claiming he does not have sufficient time to reach the safety point in the mountains. God granted his request, allowing him to stay in Zoar, and hence delaying the destruction til morning.

One could only imagine the victorious celebration that night in Sodom: The angels escaped, Lot was kicked out, and the city is intact – indeed, laughing at God's threats.

How many anti-monotheistic stories and ethoses were formed that night? To understand the magnitude of the setback to monotheism, one can look at the 1973 Yom Kippur War's faulty "concept": Egypt will not attack Israel, since it does not have the capabilities to win back the Sinai. Israel failed to recognize the immensity of the Egyptian objective to restore their honor through a temporary victory, even if followed by defeat.

Abraham seemed to conclude that in spite of the regional pro-monotheistic environment that existed the night before, things have now changed: Gerar "fell" and can no longer be presumed God-fearing. **– *G.K.***