

Text Study: The Ones Who Cross Over



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

Genesis 12:1-6; 14:13

יבֹּא וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵךְ־לְךָ
מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ
אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ: בַּוְּאֶעֱשֶׂךָ לְגוֹי
גָּדוֹל וְאַבְרָכְךָ וְאַגְדִּלְךָ שְׁמֶךָ וְהָיָה
בְּרָכָה: גַּוְּאַבְרָכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ
אֶאָר וְנִבְרָכוּ בְּךָ כָּל מְשֻׁפָּחֹת הָאָדָמָה:
דַּוַּיְלֵךְ אַבְרָם בְּאֶשֶׁר דָּבַר אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה
וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בֶּן־חַמֶּשׁ שָׁנִים
וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בְּצֵאתוֹ מִחָרָן: הַוַּיִּשְׁח
אַבְרָם אֶת־שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־לוֹט
בֶּן־אָחִיו וְאֶת־כָּל־רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכְשׁוּ
וְאֶת־הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן וַיֵּצְאוּ
לְלֶכֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:
וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם שְׁכֵם
עַד אֵלוֹן מוֹרָה וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי אָז בְּאֶרֶץ:

ידִּיג וַיָּבֹא הַפְּלִיט וַיִּגַּד לְאַבְרָם הָעֵבֶרִי
וְהוּא שָׁכֵן בְּאֵלֵי מַמְרֵה הָאֱמֹרִי אַחִי
אֲשֶׁפֶל וְאַחִי עֶנְר וְהֵם בְּעֵלֵי
בְרִית־אַבְרָם:

^{12:1} Adonai said to Abram, "Go forth from your land, your birthplace, your father's house, to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and it shall be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and I will pronounce doom on those who curse you; through you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." ⁴So Abram went forth as Adonai had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. ⁵Abram took his wife Sarai, his brother's son Lot, all the possessions they had amassed, and the people they had acquired in Haran. They set forth for the land of Canaan, and they arrived in the land of Canaan. ⁶Abram then **crossed over** the land as far as the sacred site of Shechem, as far as the Oak of Moreh. (At that time the Canaanites were present in the land.)

^{14:13} A fugitive then came and told **Abram the Hebrew (literally: the one who crosses over)**, who was living by the oak trees of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshkol and Aner, who were allied to Abram by treaty.

Rashi on Genesis 12:2

וְאֶעֱשֶׂךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל. לְפִי שֶׁהִדְרָךְ גּוֹרְמֵת לְשִׁלְשָׁה דְּבָרִים, מִמַּעֲטָת פְּרִיָּה וּרְצִיָּה וּמִמַּעֲטָת חַת
הַמָּמוֹן וּמִמַּעֲטָת חַת הַשֵּׁם, לְכַךְ הִזְקַק לְשִׁלְשׁ צְרֻכּוֹת הַלָּלוּ, שֶׁהִבְטִיחוּ עַל הַבָּנִים וְעַל הַמָּמוֹן
וְעַל הַשֵּׁם

וְאֶעֱשֶׂךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל (AND I WILL MAKE OF YOU A GREAT NATION) — Since travelling is the cause of three things — it decreases (breaks up) family life, it reduces one's wealth and lessens one's renown — he therefore needed these three blessings: that God should promise him children, wealth and a great name (Genesis Rabbah 39:11).

Discussion Questions:

1. The text does not only say that Avram left home. It says that he left his land, his birthplace, and his father's house. What is the significance of naming these three locations? What do they tell us about the meaning of home and what is involved in leaving home (hint: look at Rashi's commentary on Genesis 12:2)?
2. In her commentary on this Torah portion in *New Studies in Bereishit (Genesis)*, Nehama Leibowitz points out the unusual order of country, then birthplace, then father's house. She explains that we would have expected a move from father's house, to birthplace, to country. What do you make of the order? What does it tell us about the difficulty of leaving each place?
3. Once Avram leaves home, he is described as "Avram Ha'Ivri" — Avram the one who crosses over. Of all the descriptors that could have been chosen for Avram and for the Jewish people (*Ha'Ivrim*), why choose to focus on the idea of crossing over/crossing boundaries as a definitive feature? How might this shape our understanding of the formation of Jewish identity?
4. In what ways does the legacy of crossing over/traveling in search of home and safety inform your own Jewish identity? How has it been reflected in your family's experiences?
5. For the first time in history, the Jewish people are no longer predominately a refugee people. What, then, does it mean to embody our name in the context of the contemporary refugee crisis?
6. How might Rashi's commentary on Genesis 12:2 inform how we support refugees in our community today?

Genesis Rabbah 42:8

וַיִּגַד לְאַבְרָם הָעִבְרִי, . . . רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר כָּל הָעוֹלָם בְּלוּ מֵעֶבֶר אֶחָד וְהוּא מֵעֶבֶר אֶחָד.

"And told Avram the Hebrew" — R. Judah said: [*Ha'Ivri* signifies that] the whole world was on one side (*ever*) while he was on the other side (*ever*).

Discussion Questions:

1. What new layer of meaning does R. Judah add to the meaning of the Jewish people being called *Ha'Ivrim*?
2. In our country's increasingly divisive political climate, what does it mean to be "the ones on the other side" when it comes to fulfilling our obligation to welcome, love, and protect the stranger? What are all the ways we can cross boundaries as we fulfill this obligation?