

Upon their return from Egypt, the Torah records a dispute between the shepherds of Abraham and Lot. The Torah mentions that at that time, the Canaanites inhabited the land. In the aftermath of this dispute Abraham suggests they go their separate ways. He offers Lot the choice of where to settle, with Abraham promising to settle in the opposite direction of wherever Lot chooses to settle. He promises to come to Lot's aid should the need arise. What was the nature of their dispute and the suggested solution and implementation?

Lot was captured in the war between the kings. Upon hearing of his nephew's capture, Abraham makes good on his promise to come to Lot's aid. He defeats the group of 4 kings and returns the captives and their property, including his nephew. The king of Sodom greets Abraham and offers that Abraham keep the spoils of war and return the people to him. Abraham refuses, saying he does not desire anything from the spoils of war, as Gd promised to make him wealthy and he did not seek human intervention in that promise. What was the long term impact of Abraham's response in rejecting both the spoils and the people?

When Abraham was informed by Gd that He intended to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham fervently prayed to Gd to spare the cities if there were righteous people dwelling there. Given that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were so wicked, why did Abraham feel responsible to intercede on their behalf? Rashi notes Gd informed Abraham of His intention to destroy the cities out of courtesy to Abraham. As Gd made him the father of many nations, apparently including the 5 cities about to be destroyed, He felt it was proper to notify Abraham of their impending demise and destruction. Where do we find Abraham's connection to these 5 cities that would warrant informing Abraham and his interceding on their behalf?

With the death of Lot's father Haran in Ur Kasdim, Abraham adopted Lot and took him along when he and Terach departed Ur Kasdim and subsequently Charan. When Gd commanded Abraham to distance himself still further from his father's house, Lot again accompanied him. Indeed, not only was Lot his nephew, he was also his brother-in-law and Sarah's brother. Apparently, Abraham and presumably Sarah, felt a connection and responsibility for Lot.

Along their journey, Abraham and Sarah encountered many people and opened their eyes to a belief in the One and Only Gd, as the Torah says **את הנפש אשר עשו בחרן**. Having been essentially raised by Abraham and Sarah, Lot should have been their primary and most prominent disciple. Indeed, their influence may have accounted for Lot keeping the secret that Sarah was Abraham's wife when they arrived in Egypt.

When they returned to Canaan from Egypt, Lot's attitude towards Abraham and Sarah began to change. He challenged Abraham's authority as told in the story of the argument between the shepherds. Lot began to realize that Abraham and Sarah had no children of their own and as their closest relative, he would be the one to inherit the land promised to Abraham. Lot begins to reject Abraham and his Gd as well, **אי אפשי לי לא באברהם ולא באלקיו**.

Upon becoming aware of his nephews' plan and attitude, Abraham realized that perhaps the union with Lot had run its course. The Torah says **והכנעני אז בארץ**, the Canaanites were still in the land. Rashi notes that Abraham had not yet inherited the land he was promised and therefore Lot had no rights to the land at that time, even those of a prospective heir. Upon seeing Lot's new combative attitude, Abraham suggests they separate and go in opposite directions.

Realizing that for at least the foreseeable future the land belonged to the Canaanites, Lot saw little value in settling in the Canaanite lands. Instead, he chose the plains and lush grazing lands around Sodom. With this decision, he displayed his utter contempt for Abraham and his way of life, as he chose to live among the people of Sodom, whom the Torah explicitly says were wicked and utterly rejected Gd, instead of following the path of Abraham. There could be no greater protest and rejection of Abraham, his teachings and his way of life. Like Abraham and Lot, the people of Sodom and the surrounding areas were descendants of Shem. Lot decided that he was better off establishing his homestead in his quasi – ancestral lands than waiting for Abraham to inherit the lands of Canaan.

Abraham's destiny was in the land of Canaan. He settled the land he was promised in anticipation and preparation for his children to ultimately inherit that land. In the subsequent story of the battle of the 4 kings against the 5 kings, the Canaanites are not mentioned. The 9 protagonists were all descendants of Shem. This was an internecine war among Shem's children. The group of 5 kings ruled over the very cities that only a short time later were destroyed by Gd. This group included even the city of Tzoar, slated for destruction but ultimately spared to provide temporary shelter for Lot as he escaped the destruction of Sodom and the other 3 cities. Aner, Eshkol and Mamre, Canaanite allies of Abraham, assisted Abraham in his war efforts. Lot was caught in the family struggle for power.

Upon hearing that his nephew was captured, Abraham fulfills his promise to come to Lot's aid even after they went their separate ways. He is successful in defeating the 4 kings and retrieving Lot and the rest of the population that lived in the 5 cities. The Torah tells us that the kings approached Abraham and offered him to keep the spoils of war but return the people to the kings. Abraham rejects their offer and returns both the people and the spoils to the kings. Rashi quotes the Midrash that they assembled in the Shaveh Valley to anoint Abraham as their prince and overlord. Shem, the ancestor of all the combatants greeted Abraham after the battle with bread and wine to demonstrate that he harbored no ill will towards Abraham for killing his descendants in the just completed battle. After all, Abraham himself was a descendant of Shem. Abraham outgrew his role as the father of Aram and expanded his role to the father of many nations, including the 9 kingdoms he just battled against and rescued. Ultimately Gd changed his name to recognize this change in Abraham's status and reputation.

Rashi notes that the word **אָחֵר** connotes close proximity in time to the previous story. The Torah tells us that after these events, **אָחֵר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה**, having just rescued Lot from his captors, Abraham realizes he still has no children of his own. Without an heir, who will inherit his legacy? He notes that at that point his closest confidante was his Canaanite servant, Eliezer. He wonders, perhaps this is the time for a rapprochement with his estranged nephew Lot? Gd reassures him that he will have children of his own, and neither Eliezer or Lot will inherit him. Abraham has faith in Gd and his promise.

The Torah tells us that Gd decided to inform Abraham of his decision to destroy the 5 towns. Why did Gd feel the need to inform Abraham? Rashi notes Gd reasoned that He gave these towns to Abraham as **אב המון גויים**, it would not be proper to destroy the towns without first notifying their father. When did Abraham become the father of these towns? When he defeated the 4 kings and was selected as their overlord and prince. The Torah tells us that the Canaanites were conquering the land that belonged to Shem. Abraham was promised as his inheritance the lands conquered by the Canaanites. This was now expanded to include the land of Canaan as well as the other lands that belonged to Shem, including the areas surrounding the 5 cities consigned to destruction.

Why did Abraham leap into prayer and intercession on their behalf? It was not simply because his nephew Lot still dwelt among them and his protection pact remained in force. Abraham realized that he made a terrible mistake 25 or 30 years prior. After rescuing the cities and being offered the spoils of war in return for the people, Abraham rejected any monetary rewards. Why did the kings make Abraham such an offer?

They realized their lifestyle was incompatible with Abraham's. They wanted to retain the people to rebuild their corrupt societies. Eventually they would accumulate wealth again as long as they retained their people with their selfish and vile lifestyle. Abraham, the great herald of morality, anchored in a belief in the one true Gd, had an opportunity to remake the societies of these towns. Rejecting the offer of spoils and instead demanding the people be given to him, to train them in the proper ways, he could reverse their wicked status. Instead of being **רעים וחטאים** 'לל, rebellious towards Gd, he could reorient them towards a philosophy and lifestyle based on truth, honesty and the belief in the One True Gd. In one shot, through his right to demand their loyalty and obedience as their savior and conqueror, he could transform the people. His status as prince and overlord was recognized at the Valley of Shaveh. He had the right to demand and do it.

The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah preempted Abraham from reorienting the people when they offered him the spoils of war. They were afraid they would lose control over the minds and souls of their people, and together with them would

have to submit to Abraham. They would have to forfeit their corrupt lifestyle and adopt the moral one Abraham preached and would demand of them. Abraham made no such demand and facilitated them to continue their evil ways.

Upon being informed by Gd that the abuses of the people of Sodom had reached a breaking point, Abraham realized he squandered his opportunity years ago to demand the people replace their status of רעים וחטאים לד' and retrain them to adopt his philosophy of charity, kindness and belief in Gd. He felt personally responsible for their predicament and leapt to defend them. Perhaps they can still be saved physically and morally. This time they would be compelled to listen to him when he informs them that he, Abraham, rescued them again from imminent destruction. This time he would demand the נפש, their moral souls, they would be compelled to listen to him. If there are even a few righteous people in the cities who can act as moral guides, he could work with them to retrain the people and put them on a proper moral path. However it was too late for the people of the 5 towns as they were already beyond saving.

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