



Parashat Lech Lecha  
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The Torah offers virtually no information about the background of Avraham, and begins the story of the patriarch at the point when God spoke to him and commanded him to relocate in Canaan, at the age of seventy-five. The *Midrashim*, however, are rich in material about this remarkable personality, telling how he independently arrived at the belief in monotheism and his struggles to establish this belief in a pagan world. The accounts of his confrontations with the king Nimrod, and the persecution he suffered as a result, are very well-known and cited by many later writers.

Maimonides, in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (3:29), writes that these accounts are prevalent not only in our Midrashic tradition, but also in non-Jewish chronicles. Referring to the religious works of the Sabians, Maimonides writes:

In these books, and in their chronicles, the history of Abraham our father is given in the following manner. Abraham was brought up in Kutha [in Mesopotamia]; when he differed from the people and declared that there is a Maker besides the sun, they raised certain objections... In short, the king put him in prison; but he continued many days, while in prison, to argue against them. At last the king was afraid that Abraham might corrupt the kingdom, and turn the people away from their religion; he therefore expelled Abraham into Syria, after having deprived him of all his property.

This is their account which you find clearly stated in the book called *The Nabatean Agriculture*.

According to this account, Abraham was expelled westward from his Mesopotamian homeland due to the danger his monotheistic polemics posed to the pagan rulers.

Nachmanides cites Maimonides' account in his Torah commentary (Bereishit 11:28) and in his *Derasha al Kohelet* (published in *Kitvei Ha-Ramban*, vol. 1, p. 203), and enlists it to explain the Torah's perplexing description of Avraham's migration to Canaan. In the final verses of Parashat Noach, the Torah relates that Avraham's father, Terach, took the family from the city of Ur Kasdim in order to relocate in Canaan, but they settled in the town of Charan, without ever reaching Canaan (11:31). Thereafter, in the beginning of Parashat Lekh-Lekha, God commands Avraham to leave and settle in Canaan (12:5). The commentators struggle with the question of why Avraham's father began heading toward Canaan, and why in the end they settled in Charan. Nachmanides suggests that the Torah's account of Terach's departure from Ur Kasdim might correspond with Maimonides' account of Avraham's expulsion from the kingdom where he lived. Terach sought to flee with his family westward, all the way to Canaan, where they would be free from the political grips of the authorities in the region of Ur Kasdim.

But Terach then decided to remain in Charan, while God commanded Avraham to continue migrating westward.

This approach may shed light on God's promise to Avraham when He commanded him to migrate to Canaan: "I shall make you into a great nation" (12:2). God informs Avraham that he cannot triumph over the pagan rulers as an individual, working within their sphere of influence. It was rather necessary for him to go elsewhere and establish a new, powerful nation that would represent the ideals of monotheism. Terach was perhaps correct in assuming the family was safely beyond the king's clutches in Charan, but God now tells Avraham that escaping does not suffice. Instead, he is to continue migrating until he reaches a land where he could build God's special nation charged with the task of representing Him to the rest of mankind. Only a large, influential nation could succeed in undermining the pagan beliefs and spread the truth of monotheism throughout the world.