

TORAH PORTION "LECH LECHA", NOVEMBER 6-12, 2005

"SOJOURNERS AND ALTARS"¹ by Rami Danieli © 2005

This week's portion is very dear to me, as it was the very portion read in the week that I moved from Israel over to the U.S (almost five years ago)! It has now been five months since we returned to our homeland, and as many of you already know, it has been a very difficult time for us. The trials we have experienced made us (and not for the first time since we moved back) wonder whether or not it was really His will for us to move over here at this time.

Let us now go right into the Torah portion for this week, which, interestingly enough, has much to do with our experiences over here since we moved back! I ask the following questions:

1. What are we in this world?
2. Are we true followers of Israel's Messiah?
3. If so, then how should we perceive life while here on planet earth?

Simeon (Peter) described Yeshua's followers as "sojourners and pilgrims" (1 Pet. 2:11. see also Heb. 11:13)! And Yeshua said that we are in the world but "*not* of the world" (John 15:19)!

Abraham is a great example of being a sojourner or pilgrim as well as being *not* of the world. No wonder scriptures teach us that while *in Yeshua* we are *all* "sons of Abraham"! Abraham is "our father" and an example (Acts 7:2, Gal. 3:7, 29). Abraham was the very first man who was called by the Almighty to move from his homeland. He had to leave his secure comfort zone to go unto a strange land, a very specific geographic location, called the land of Canaan and later on known as the Promised Land—The Land of Israel (Gen. 12:1-5)!

As we carefully read our Torah portion, we can see that Abraham sojourned back and forth through the Promised Land. He was pretty much a nomad. And, in two places, it is said that, "The Canaanites were then in the land" (Gen. 12:6, 13:7). Moreover, almost every place Abraham went through, he built an altar to the Lord at the site where the Lord appeared and/or spoke to him (Gen. 12:7, 8, 13:8).

So what's the point in building altars to the Lord? Throughout scriptures, many of God's people met God (or His special messengers) at an altar they built for Him. Here are only a few examples: Genesis 8:20, Exodus 17:15, Judges 6:24, 13:15-20, and I Kings 18:30.

The Hebrew word for "Altar" is "*Mizbeach*" (4196), which comes from yet another Hebrew word, "*Zavach*" (2076) or "*Lizvoach*". "Z.V(B).Ch" is a primitive root: **To slaughter an animal (usually in sacrifice), kill, offer, (do) sacrifice, slay.** As you can see, the main connotation that the word Altar has is slaying, killing and sacrifice.

Let us now tie up the above points and relate them to our lives, here and now. While we are only

“Sojourners and Pilgrims” in this world, wishing to keep our focus on the only real home we have and the only One True Lord we are to serve, how are we to function in our daily life?

The only possible answer the Bible presents to us is by *not* appealing to the flesh! Nevertheless, it is the *only* way to survive our journey in this “Sodom and Gomorrah” kind of world that surrounds us everywhere.

We are to recognize that we are *not* alone. No, I’m not talking about God being with us right now, rather, I speak of acknowledging the existence of the enemies of our souls (these Canaanites and Perizzites or the demonic world) which are with us in the Promised Land (our souls)! And, while “traveling through this world”, we are to fight against these enemies by making sure that our ears are tuned to His voice. Then we need to react by building spiritual altars to Him! Yes! While pilgrimaging through this world, we are to, as much as possible, *die to self, kill the deeds of our flesh, and offer ourselves to Him* (on a spiritual altar) on a daily basis!

Only by building altars to our God and Savior, and fellowshiping there with Him, offering ourselves as “living sacrifices” to Him, can we survive the many hardships we go through in this life (i.e. the many times we experience what our father Abraham experienced: the “great famine” and the “going down to Egypt”).

May God continue to be with us all and bless us all with the hearing of His voice this week (and forever more)!

In Him,

Rami