

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter III: Lech Lecha (Gen. 12:1–17:27)

Essay 24. Why did the angel tell Hagar her son would be a robber?

פְּסוּק "וְהוּא יְהִי פָרָא אָדָם" וכו'. מְקוּשִׁים לְמָה הַמְלֵאךְ נָתַן בְּשׂוֹרָה זוֹ רָעָה לְהַגֵּר שְׂבָנָה יְהִיָּה לְקָטָיִם.

There is a **verse** in which an angel tells Hagar that she is pregnant with Ishmael, and that, **“He will be a wild ass of a man, his hand against everyone, and everyone’s hand against him . . .”** (Gen. 16:12). **[People] question why the angel told Hagar in this bad way that her son would be a robber.**

וּמִצָּאָנוּ שֶׁפֶתַח הַש"ף שֶׁהִטְעַם שְׁהִיְתָה שָׂרָה עֲקָרָה, כְּדִי לְשַׁבֵּיךָ כֶּךָ וּבֵינֵינוּ כֶּךָ יֵצֵא יִשְׁמַעְאֵל מֵאַבְרָהָם וַיִּשְׂאוּב כָּל הַזֵּוֹתֵמָא שָׁל תִּרְחַח שְׁהִיְתָה בּוֹ בְּאַבְרָהָם וְכו'. עוֹד פִּרְשׁ רַש"י עַל פְּסוּק "וְנִתְרָא כִי הִרְתָּה וְאַקַּל בְּעֵינֶיךָ", שְׁהִיְתָה אוֹמְרַת שְׂר[י] זוֹ אֵין סִתְרָה כְּגִלְוִיָּה וְכו'.

We find that the Shach wrote that the reason that Sarah was barren, was that between this and that, Ishmael would come from Abraham and all the moral contamination from Terach that was within the genes of Abraham would be drawn out at that time, i.e., into Ishmael, rather than into Sarah’s later-born son, Isaac.¹

Also, Rashi explained on the verse[s], “when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was lowered in her esteem. And Sarai said to Abram, ‘The wrong done me is your fault! I myself put my maid in your bosom; **now that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her esteem’**” (Gen. 16:4–5), **that [Hagar] was saying, “This Sarai² is not in private as in public: she shows herself as a righteous woman, but she is not a righteous woman, for she didn’t merit to become pregnant all these years, whereas I became pregnant from the first intercourse.”**³

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¹ Rabbi Mordechai Ha’Cohen of Safed (1523–98), *Sifte Cohen on Torah* (Venice 1605), parashat Lech Lecha.

² The first edition reads “Sarah,” but the translator has corrected to match the sources’ reading of “Sarai,” which is more appropriate for the timeline, coming before Sarai’s renaming.

³ Rashi’s comment on Gen. 16:4 is based on Midrash Gen. Rabbah 45:4.

וְלָכֵן אָמַר לָהּ מַלְאָךְ "שׁוּבִי אֶל־גְּבִרְתְּךָ וְהִתְעַנִּי תַּחַת יְדֶיהָ", כְּלוֹמַר צָרִיךְ שְׂאֵת תִּהְיֶי כַּפּוּפָה לָהּ לְפִי שֶׁהִיא צְדִיקַת אֶרֶץ בְּסֶטֶר. וְיָמָּה שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה לָהּ בְּנִים אֲדָרְבָּא זֶה הָיָה בְּשִׁבִיל מַעֲשֵׂיֶיהָ הַטּוֹבִים שֶׁתּוֹכָה לִהְיוֹת לָהּ בֶּן הַגּוֹן, וְאִם הָיְתָה יוֹלְדֶת עִתָּה הָיָה הַבֶּן הַנּוֹלָד שׁוֹאֵב זִיקָתוֹ שֶׁל תְּרַח שֶׁהָיְתָה בּוֹ בְּאֲבָרָהֶם. וּבְשִׁבִיל זְכוּתָהּ הָיְתָה עֲקָרָה, וְהָרְאָהָ עַל זֶה שֶׁהָיָה הַבֶּן הַנּוֹלָד לָהּ "יְהִיָּה פָּרָא אָדָם", לְסָטִים, "יָדוּ בְּכָל יוֹד כָּל בּוֹ".

Therefore, the angel said to [Hagar], “Go back to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hands” (Gen. 16:9), as if to say, “It’s necessary that you shall be subject to her, because she is a righteous woman, even in secret. As to why she doesn’t have children; to the contrary, this was because of her good deeds, that she has merited to have a decent son, but if she had given birth now, the son being born would draw out the moral contamination of Terach that was within the genes of Abraham. Because of her merit, [Sarai] will be barren [until Abraham is cleared of the impurity of his father], and the proof of this is that the son that will be born to you, [Ishmael,] ‘will be a wild ass of a man,’ a robber, ‘his hand against everyone, and everyone’s hand against him . . .’ ”

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