

Parsha Pearls

Chayei Sarah 5768

I am a stranger and a resident among you; give me a portion of land for burial among you, so that I might bury my dead from before me (23:4).

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, explains why Avraham called himself "a stranger and a resident". He meant to say: "If you agree to sell it to me, I will be a stranger and buy it. But if you do not agree, I will be a resident – an owner – and take it by my own rights, for the Holy One, blessed is He, said, 'I will give this land to your offspring.'"

The commentators ask that in Parshas Lech Lecha, when Lot's shepherds allowed his sheep to graze in the Canaanite fields and Avraham rebuked him, the Torah says, "And the Canaanite and the Perizite were then living in the land." Rashi comments that they were still living there and the time had not yet come to give the land to Avraham's family, so Lot was wrong for stealing the grass. If so, how would Avraham have had the right to take the burial plot?

The Levush Haorah resolves this question by saying that in Parshas Lech Lecha, the time for fulfilling the promise had not yet come, because Avraham did not yet have any offspring then. Now, however, he had Yitzchok, so the time had come.

But Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi shows from a passage in Bereishis Rabbah (41:5) that the time had still not come. The Midrash says that when Lot's shepherds made their argument that the land would eventually belong to Lot, G-d said,

"When I promised the land to Avraham's offspring, I meant only when the seven Canaanite nations are uprooted from it, but now the Canaanite and the Perizite are still living in the land." Here we see that even when Avraham had offspring, the land did not belong to him as long as the Canaanites still lived there.

Similarly, the Yefeh Soar asks from the verse, "And a fourth generation will return here, for the sin of the Emorite will not be complete until then" (Bereishis 15:16). This was a prophecy that Avraham's descendents would not get the Holy Land until after four generations of Egyptian exile. Avraham merely having one child was clearly not enough.

In Yehoshua 14:15 we read, "The name of Hebron was originally Kiryas Arba; he was the great man among the giants, and the land rested from war." Rashi explains that the prophet is telling us why the land rested from war for the forty years that the Israelites spent in the wilderness – why did the Canaanites deserve that grace period? They should have been conquered right away after the Exodus. The answer is "the great man among the giants" – Avraham Avinu, whom the Canaanites honored and called "a prince of G-d among us" (Bereishis 23:6). As a reward for honoring Avraham, they were allowed to stay in the land for forty extra years.

We could take this a step further and say that not only those extra forty years were due to their honoring Avraham, but also the four hundred years from the birth of Yitzchak until the Exodus. The Canaanites were the most immoral of peoples – the Torah uses "the acts of the Land of Canaan" as the example of immorality that Jews are forbidden to follow (Vayikra 18:3). They should have lost their rights to the land, but since they honored Avraham, they were allowed to stay. When G-d foretold the

Egyptian exile and the "fourth generation" coming back in Bereishis 15:16, that was because G-d knew the future, that the Canaanites would honor Avraham.

Thus Avraham said to them, "If you honor me, I am but a stranger among you. But should you choose not to honor me and you refuse to sell me the burial plot, you will lose your rights to the land, and I will be a resident, a rightful owner." (Divrei Yoel, p. 490)