**Parshat Lech Lecha Text Study**

**The Promised Land**

**Prepared by Rabbi Nina H. Mandel, 10/25/12**

Each handout is double-sided, with a biblical text selection on one side and a “contemporary” text selection on the other. Each selection represents a view of what “Promised Land” means, and has been interpreted by Jewish thinkers, over the millennia.

With a large enough group of people, I will split them into three groups, giving each one of the texts to discuss. We will then come back together to share thoughts.

Some guiding questions:

1. How do you interpret what the biblical text is saying about promising the land?
2. What is the importance of the brit milah/circumcision to this covenant of the land?
3. Should the biblical text be read as prescriptive?
4. How does the Basel text differ from the Declaration of Israeli Independence?
5. How is the role of Divine Election reflected in each of the texts?
6. Would you consider Avraham Burg anti-Zionist?
7. How do the psalmist and liturgist talk about return: are they aspirational or are they prescriptive?
8. What is the significance of the mention of Sarai/Sarah in the covenantal text?
9. Why is a covenant involving land so important in the biblical story at this point?
10. What questions does the text bring up for you?

**Handout 1**

**Genesis 12**

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|  וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם, לֶךְ-לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ.  | **1** Now Adonai said to Abram: 'Get yourself out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you.  |
| **ב** וְאֶעֶשְׂךָ, לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל, וַאֲבָרֶכְךָ, וַאֲגַדְּלָה שְׁמֶךָ; וֶהְיֵה, בְּרָכָה.  | **2** And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and you will be a blessing.  |
| **ג** וַאֲבָרְכָה, מְבָרְכֶיךָ, וּמְקַלֶּלְךָ, אָאֹר; וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ, כֹּל מִשְׁפְּחֹת הָאֲדָמָה.  | **3** And I will bless them that bless you, and him that curses you will I curse; and in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'  |
| **ד** וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם, כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו יְהוָה, וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ, לוֹט; וְאַבְרָם, בֶּן-חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה, בְּצֵאתוֹ, מֵחָרָן.  | **4** So Abram went, as Adonai had spoken to him; and Lot went with him; and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.  |
| **ה** וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת-שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת-לוֹט בֶּן-אָחִיו, וְאֶת-כָּל-רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁוּ, וְאֶת-הַנֶּפֶשׁ, אֲשֶׁר-עָשׂוּ בְחָרָן; וַיֵּצְאוּ, לָלֶכֶת אַרְצָה כְּנַעַן, וַיָּבֹאוּ, אַרְצָה כְּנָעַן.  | **5** And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.  |
| **ו** וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם, בָּאָרֶץ, עַד מְקוֹם שְׁכֶם, עַד אֵלוֹן מוֹרֶה; וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי, אָז בָּאָרֶץ.  | **6** And Abram passed through the land into the place of Shechem, into the terebinth of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.  |

**Genesis 13**

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| **ז** וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה, אֶל-אַבְרָם, וַיֹּאמֶר, לְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת; וַיִּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ, לַיהוָה הַנִּרְאֶה אֵלָיו.  | **7** And Adonai appeared to Abram, and said: 'Unto your seed will I give this land'; and he built there an altar to Adonai, who appeared to him.  |
| **יד** וַיהוָה אָמַר אֶל-אַבְרָם, אַחֲרֵי הִפָּרֶד-לוֹט מֵעִמּוֹ, שָׂא נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה, מִן-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה שָׁם--צָפֹנָה וָנֶגְבָּה, וָקֵדְמָה וָיָמָּה.  | **14** And Adonai said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward;  |
| **טו** כִּי אֶת-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-אַתָּה רֹאֶה, לְךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה, וּלְזַרְעֲךָ, עַד-עוֹלָם.  | **15** for all the land which you see, to you will I give it, and to your seed forever.  |
| **טז** וְשַׂמְתִּי אֶת-זַרְעֲךָ, כַּעֲפַר הָאָרֶץ: אֲשֶׁר אִם-יוּכַל אִישׁ, לִמְנוֹת אֶת-עֲפַר הָאָרֶץ--גַּם-זַרְעֲךָ, יִמָּנֶה.  | **16** And I will make you seed as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall your seed also be numbered.  |
| **יז** קוּם הִתְהַלֵּךְ בָּאָרֶץ, לְאָרְכָּהּ וּלְרָחְבָּהּ: כִּי לְךָ, אֶתְּנֶנָּה.  | **17** Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for to you will I give it.'  |

**Psalm 122**

I rejoiced when they said to me, “Let us go up to the house of the Lord.”

We now stand within your gates O Jerusalem.

Jerusalem which is rebuilt, as a city united and whole.

Where the tribes made pilgrimages,

The tribes of the Lord as witness of Israel,

To praise the name of the Lord.

For there stood the thrones of justice, thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: may those who love you have security.

Peace be within your walls, security within your citadels.

For the sake of my brethren and friends, I would say, “Peace be with you.”

For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I would seek your good.

**From the morning liturgy:**

Gather our people in peace from the four corners of the earth and lead us up in dignity to our land, for You are the God that performs might deeds of deliverance.

**The Basel Program, 1897**

The aim of Zionism is to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law. The (First Zionist) Congress contemplates the following means to the attainment of this end:

1. The promotion, on suitable lines, of the colonization of Palestine by Jewish agricultural and industrial workers.
2. The organization and binding together of the whole Jewry by means of appropriate institutions, local and international in accordance with the laws of each country.
3. The strengthening and fostering of Jewish national sentiment and consciousness.
4. Preparatory steps towards obtaining government consent, where necessary to the attainment of the aim of Zionism.

**Handout 2**

**Genesis 15**

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| **יח** וַיֶּאֱהַל אַבְרָם, וַיָּבֹא וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֵלֹנֵי מַמְרֵא--אֲשֶׁר בְּחֶבְרוֹן; וַיִּבֶן-שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ, לַיהוָה.  | **18** And Abram moved his tent, and came and dwelt by the terebinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built there an altar to Adonai.  |
| **ו** וְהֶאֱמִן, בַּיהוָה; וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לּוֹ, צְדָקָה.  | **6** And he believed in Adonai; and He counted it to him for righteousness.  |
| **ז** וַיֹּאמֶר, אֵלָיו: אֲנִי יְהוָה, אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים--לָתֶת לְךָ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת, לְרִשְׁתָּהּ.  | **7** And He said to him: 'I am the LORD that brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give you this land to inherit it.'  |
| **ח** וַיֹּאמַר: אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה, בַּמָּה אֵדַע כִּי אִירָשֶׁנָּה.  | **8** And he said: 'O Adonai, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?'  |
| **ט** וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו, קְחָה לִי עֶגְלָה מְשֻׁלֶּשֶׁת, וְעֵז מְשֻׁלֶּשֶׁת, וְאַיִל מְשֻׁלָּשׁ; וְתֹר, וְגוֹזָל.  | **9** And He said to him: 'Take Me a heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon.'  |
| **י** וַיִּקַּח-לוֹ אֶת-כָּל-אֵלֶּה, וַיְבַתֵּר אֹתָם בַּתָּוֶךְ, וַיִּתֵּן אִישׁ-בִּתְרוֹ, לִקְרַאת רֵעֵהוּ; וְאֶת-הַצִּפֹּר, לֹא בָתָר.  | **10** And he took all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each half over against the other; but the birds he did not divide.  |
| **יא** וַיֵּרֶד הָעַיִט, עַל-הַפְּגָרִים; וַיַּשֵּׁב אֹתָם, אַבְרָם.  | **11** And the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.  |
| **יב** וַיְהִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לָבוֹא, וְתַרְדֵּמָה נָפְלָה עַל-אַבְרָם; וְהִנֵּה אֵימָה חֲשֵׁכָה גְדֹלָה, נֹפֶלֶת עָלָיו.  | **12** And it came to pass, that, when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, a dread, even a great darkness, fell upon him.  |
| **יג** וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם, יָדֹעַ תֵּדַע כִּי-גֵר יִהְיֶה זַרְעֲךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם, וַעֲבָדוּם, וְעִנּוּ אֹתָם--אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת, שָׁנָה.  | **13** And He said to Abram: 'Know for sure that your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;  |
| **יד** וְגַם אֶת-הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ, דָּן אָנֹכִי; וְאַחֲרֵי-כֵן יֵצְאוּ, בִּרְכֻשׁ גָּדוֹל.  | **14** and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great substance.  |
| **טו** וְאַתָּה תָּבוֹא אֶל-אֲבֹתֶיךָ, בְּשָׁלוֹם: תִּקָּבֵר, בְּשֵׂיבָה טוֹבָה.  | **15** But you will go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.  |
| **טז** וְדוֹר רְבִיעִי, יָשׁוּבוּ הֵנָּה: כִּי לֹא-שָׁלֵם עֲו‍ֹן הָאֱמֹרִי, עַד-הֵנָּה.  | **16** And in the fourth generation they shall come back here…  |
| **יח** בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, כָּרַת יְהוָה אֶת-אַבְרָם--בְּרִית לֵאמֹר: לְזַרְעֲךָ, נָתַתִּי אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת, מִנְּהַר מִצְרַיִם, עַד-הַנָּהָר הַגָּדֹל נְהַר-פְּרָת.  | **18** In that day Adonai made a covenant with Abram, saying: 'To your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates…  |

**Declaration of Israel’s Independence, 1948 (excerpts)**

The land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and national identity was formed. Here they achieved independence and created a culture of national and universal significance. Here they wrote and gave the Bible to the world.

 Exiled from Palestine, the Jewish people remained faithful to it in all their countries of their dispersion, never ceasing to pray and hope for their return and the restoration of their national freedom.

 Impelled by this historic association, Jews strove throughout the centuries to go back to the land of their fathers and regain their statehood. In recent decades they returned in masses. They reclaimed the wilderness, revived their language, built cities and villages and established a vigorous and ever-growing community with its own economic and cultural life. They sought peace yet were ever prepared to defend themselves. They brought the blessing of progress to all inhabitants of the country…

 The State of Israel will be ready to cooperate with the organs and representatives of the United Nations in the implementation of the Resolution of the Assembly of November 29, 1947, and will take steps to bring about Economic Union over the whole of Palestine. We appeal to the United Nations to assist the Jewish people in the building of its State and to admit Israel into the family of nations. In the midst of wanton aggression, we yet call upon the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to return to the ways of peace and play their part in the development of the State, with full and equal citizenship and due representation in its bodies and institutions—provisional or permanent.

**Hatikvah by Naftali H. Imber, 1887**

**(adopted as official national anthem in 2004, in use from 1948)**

As long as true Jewish hearts yet beat,

And Jewish eyes turn watchfully eastward,

Our two thousand year-old hope is not lost:

To be a free people in our own land,

The land of Zion, Jerusalem, Israel!

**Handout 3**

**Genesis Chapter 17**

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| **א** וַיְהִי אַבְרָם, בֶּן-תִּשְׁעִים שָׁנָה וְתֵשַׁע שָׁנִים; וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָם, וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי-אֵל שַׁדַּי--הִתְהַלֵּךְ לְפָנַי, וֶהְיֵה תָמִים.  | **1** And when Abram was ninety nine years old, Adonai appeared to Abram, and said to him: 'I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and you will be wholehearted.  |
| **ב** וְאֶתְּנָה בְרִיתִי, בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ; וְאַרְבֶּה אוֹתְךָ, בִּמְאֹד מְאֹד.  | **2** And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.'  |
| **ג** וַיִּפֹּל אַבְרָם, עַל-פָּנָיו; וַיְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ אֱלֹהִים, לֵאמֹר.  | **3** And Abram fell on his face; and God talked with him, saying:  |
| **ד** אֲנִי, הִנֵּה בְרִיתִי אִתָּךְ; וְהָיִיתָ, לְאַב הֲמוֹן גּוֹיִם.  | **4** 'As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shalt be the father of a multitude of nations.  |
| **ה** וְלֹא-יִקָּרֵא עוֹד אֶת-שִׁמְךָ, אַבְרָם; וְהָיָה שִׁמְךָ אַבְרָהָם, כִּי אַב-הֲמוֹן גּוֹיִם נְתַתִּיךָ.  | **5** Neither shall you name any more be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for the father of a multitude of nations have I made you.  |
| **ו** וְהִפְרֵתִי אֹתְךָ בִּמְאֹד מְאֹד, וּנְתַתִּיךָ לְגוֹיִם; וּמְלָכִים, מִמְּךָ יֵצֵאוּ.  | **6** And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come out of you.  |
| **ז** וַהֲקִמֹתִי אֶת-בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ, וּבֵין זַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ לְדֹרֹתָם--לִבְרִית עוֹלָם: לִהְיוֹת לְךָ לֵאלֹהִים, וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ.  | **7** And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to you and to your seed after you.  |
| **ח** וְנָתַתִּי לְךָ וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ אֵת אֶרֶץ מְגֻרֶיךָ, אֵת כָּל-אֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן, לַאֲחֻזַּת, עוֹלָם; וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם, לֵאלֹהִים.  | **8** And I will give to you, and to your seed, the land in which you live, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.'  |
| **ט** וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-אַבְרָהָם, וְאַתָּה אֶת-בְּרִיתִי תִשְׁמֹר--אַתָּה וְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ, לְדֹרֹתָם.  | **9** And God said to Abraham: 'And as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you, and your seed after you throughout their generations.  |
| **י** זֹאת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ, בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם, וּבֵין זַרְעֲךָ, אַחֲרֶיךָ: הִמּוֹל לָכֶם, כָּל-זָכָר.  | **10** This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your seed after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.  |
| **יא** וּנְמַלְתֶּם, אֵת בְּשַׂר עָרְלַתְכֶם; וְהָיָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית, בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם.  | **11** And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of a covenant between Me and you.  |
| **יב** וּבֶן-שְׁמֹנַת יָמִים, יִמּוֹל לָכֶם כָּל-זָכָר--לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם: יְלִיד בָּיִת--וּמִקְנַת-כֶּסֶף מִכֹּל בֶּן-נֵכָר, אֲשֶׁר לֹא מִזַּרְעֲךָ הוּא.  | **12** And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money from a foreigner, that is not your seed.  |
| **יג** הִמּוֹל יִמּוֹל יְלִיד בֵּיתְךָ, וּמִקְנַת כַּסְפֶּךָ; וְהָיְתָה בְרִיתִי בִּבְשַׂרְכֶם, לִבְרִית עוֹלָם.  | **13** He that is born in your house, and he that is bought with your money, must be circumcised; and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.  |
| **יד** וְעָרֵל זָכָר, אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִמּוֹל אֶת-בְּשַׂר עָרְלָתוֹ--וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא, מֵעַמֶּיהָ: אֶת-בְּרִיתִי, הֵפַר.  | **14** And the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.'  |
| **טו** וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, אֶל-אַבְרָהָם, שָׂרַי אִשְׁתְּךָ, לֹא-תִקְרָא אֶת-שְׁמָהּ שָׂרָי: כִּי שָׂרָה, שְׁמָהּ.  | **15** And God said unto Abraham: 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be.  |
| **טז** וּבֵרַכְתִּי אֹתָהּ, וְגַם נָתַתִּי מִמֶּנָּה לְךָ בֵּן; וּבֵרַכְתִּיהָ וְהָיְתָה לְגוֹיִם, מַלְכֵי עַמִּים מִמֶּנָּה יִהְיוּ.  | **16** And I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son through her; and I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be of her.'  |

**Avraham Burg’s New Zionism by J.J. Goldberg | Wed. Jun 13, 2007**

Zionism has meant many things to many people over the past century. To Theodor Herzl and the founders of the Zionist movement, it meant creating a national home to gather in the Jewish people — to some minds, as a refuge from antisemitism; for others, as a fulfillment of an ancient promise. To Herzl’s great critic, the essayist Asher Ginsberg, better known as Ahad Ha’am, Zionism meant building a cultural and spiritual center in Israel to enrich the lives of Jews wherever they live.

To David Ben-Gurion and generations of Israelis after him, it meant the act of settling in Israel and building it, brick by brick. To millions of Jews around the world, it meant providing material and moral backing for that effort. To Palestinians and other Arabs, it meant assault and dispossession. To much of the outside world, it has come to mean the seed of seemingly endless conflict.

**Quotes from Avraham Burg, former director of the World Zionist Organization**

"I am a human being, I am a Jew and I am an Israeli. Zionism was an instrument to move me from the Jewish state of being to the Israeli state of being. I think it was Ben-Gurion who said that the Zionist movement was the scaffolding to build the home, and that after the state's establishment it should be dismantled."

"Already at the First Zionist Congress, Herzl's Zionism was victorious over the Zionism of Ahad Ha'am. I think that the 21st century should be the century of Ahad Ha'am. We have to leave Herzl behind and move to Ahad Ha'am."

“I think Israel should be defined not as a Jewish state, but as a state of the Jewish people,” Burg said. “What I mean is that the significance of the state’s content, its culture and ethos and so on, should be placed on the shoulders of every one of us. We shouldn’t be on automatic pilot.” “I see Israel as a state that was created by the Jewish people, as the expression of thousands of years of yearning,” he said. “Its governing structures should be democratic. Its content should be created by its people. When you create something called a Jewish state and then leave it on automatic pilot, the individual bears no responsibility for its content and character.”

“If a state is Jewish,” Burg said, “it is founded on a certain measure of holiness. Moses himself defined holiness as an ongoing process of actions, of behavior toward others and toward God. I am very afraid of automatic holiness. It can lead to chauvinism, to exclusivism, to all kinds of negative ramifications in relations between individuals and between nations. The Jewish people after 60 years of statehood cannot allow itself to take its holiness for granted. It has to question itself every day.”