

Parsha Ponders

Lech Lecha | October 14, 2021 | 8 Marcheshvan 5782

*Misplaced priorities*¹

ויקחו את-לוט ואת-רכשו בן-אחי אברם וילכו והוא ישב בסדם: וישב את כל-הרכש וגם את-לוט אחיו ורכשו
השיב וגם את-הנשים ואת-העם

They captured Lot and his possessions, the nephew of Avram, and he [had been] dwelling in Sedom. [Avraham] rescued all the property, and he rescued Lot his nephew and his property, and the women and the people²

The Torah describes³ what is likely the first world war. It was a war of four kings against five kings. Avraham's nephew Lot got caught in the rampage. As the enemy captured the city of Sedom and all of its inhabitants, Lot and his family were kidnapped. All of his property was seized as spoils of war. When Avraham heard what had happened to his kin, he gathered his troops⁴ with the intent to fight. Avraham and his measly army managed to defeat the enemy and rescue the captives. Lot was a free man and regained his stolen property.

The verse which describes Lot's capture is worded strangely, especially when contrasted with the verse describing his rescue. The Torah says that they captured Lot and his property, and then it describes him as the nephew of Avraham. The verse would seemingly be better phrased that they captured Lot, Avraham's nephew, along with his property. Why was Lot's property mentioned before his relationship to Avraham? We see that when he was rescued, the Torah phrases it in a normal way. It says that Avraham rescued Lot, his nephew, along with his property. Why the inconsistency?

Some say the verse is coming to stress the kings' motives in capturing Lot⁵. The whole reason they captured him and his property was because he was Avraham's nephew. Avraham's fame in the land of Canaan was gaining steam, and they felt that he was a threat to their plans. As such, they were so proud that they captured Avraham's precious nephew⁶ and his property⁷. Some go further and say that they mistook Lot for Avraham's son, as the two had similar appearances⁸. According to some reckonings⁹, this plot of the kings was one of Avraham's ten tests¹⁰. Either way, the Torah awkwardly puts Avraham's relationship to Lot at the end of the sentence in order to stress their evil intent¹¹.

¹ Based on various thoughts and ideas that I collected and come up with

² [Genesis 14:12,16](#)

³ [Ibid](#) Chapter 14

⁴ V. 14 says he took his lads ([Targum Onkelos](#) and [Targum "Yonasan"](#)). [Rashi ad. loc.](#) brings from [Nedarim 32a](#) that it's referring to his servant Eliezer, who was worth 318 men. See there for other opinions

⁵ [Radal](#) to [Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer](#) Chapter 27 § 3; [Midrash HaGadol](#) to [Genesis 14:12](#), as interpreted by [Torah Sheleimah ad. loc.](#) § 48. See also [Seforno ad. loc.](#)

⁶ [Midrash HaGadol loc. cit.](#)

⁷ [Radal loc. cit.](#) See [Sanhedrin 104b](#)

⁸ [Torah Sheleimah loc. cit.](#), based on [Zohar I parshas Lech Lecha](#) p. 86b. See also the [Midrash](#) brought in [Torah Sheleimah](#) § 63, which says that they mistook Lot for Avraham *himself* (which is an impressive mistake, considering their age difference). According to this interpretation, the reason why Avraham's relationship to Lot is mentioned last is because they didn't realize who they had captured until Lot was already in their possession

⁹ [Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer loc. cit.](#), as interpreted by [Radal](#)

¹⁰ [Avos 5:3](#)

¹¹ See [Revid HaZav](#) to [Genesis 24:12](#), by [Rav Dov Ber Tribis](#), who says that this is simply how the Torah speaks. He shows that this has *halachic* ramifications, specifically in the area of divorce documents. See [Beis Yosef](#) to [Tur Even](#)

Perhaps we can suggest a different intent for the phrasing of the verse¹². Earlier in the *parsha*¹³, we saw Lot's keen interest in his property. He and Avraham had to separate in order to avoid quarreling over each other's sheep and cattle. We also see later¹⁴, when the city of Sedom was about to be destroyed, that Lot was tarrying to escape. He was too busy trying to gather his possessions¹⁵. We see a pattern that Lot was very attached to his property. It overshadowed his relationship with his uncle, and even took precedence over his own life. The verse then is coming to emphasize that the kings captured Lot and his possessions, which to him meant everything. They meant more to him than his relationship with his uncle Avraham.

Why then is the order switched when Avraham rescues him? It would seem that Lot had a change of heart. The stress and trauma of the whole ordeal got to him. He had thoughts of repentance¹⁶, and reevaluated his priorities¹⁷. No longer would his possessions come first. To him, his relationship with his family was the focus. His rescue meant that he could be rejoined with his family. It was only an afterthought that he had now retrieved his personal belongings.

Sometimes Hashem sends us difficult situations in order to inspire us to repent. However, the whole purpose is the repentance. If we didn't need prompting to evaluate our ways, Hashem wouldn't need to send us these challenges. There would be same result, without all the pain. Perhaps if Lot had realized his mistaken priorities, he never would have been kidnapped. He could have saved himself all that grief.

Good Shabbos

HaEzer § 129. However, *Torah Sheleimah loc. cit.* § 48 points out that based on his interpretation of *Midrash HaGadol loc. cit.*, there's no basis for such an extrapolation

¹² I came up with this idea myself, and subsequently found partially similar ideas in *Kol Dodi* to *Genesis* 14:12, by *Rav Dovid HaLevi Frand* of London (he says that Lot's main connection to Avraham was through his property, which he only amassed due to their proximity, but when he was captured in Sedom their relationship wasn't obvious, so the verse mentions his property first), and *Midrash Moshe parshas Lech Lecha* 5673 *ad. loc.*, by *Rav Moshe Morgenstern* (who writes that Lot's main sin was with his property, and he felt zero connection to Avraham)

¹³ *Genesis* 13:1-12

¹⁴ *Ibid* Chapter 19

¹⁵ *Rashi ad. loc. v. 16*

¹⁶ *Kol Dodi loc. cit.* He writes that since Avraham rescued Lot, he had feelings of gratitude and decided to improve their relationship. *Midrash Moshe loc. cit.* writes after Lot was kidnapped, this atoned for his sin with his property, and now he was worthy of being called a nephew to Avraham

¹⁷ Although, as just mentioned, this new attitude didn't seem to last long. Later, when his life was in danger, he was focused again on his property