

## 5782 - Genesis 12-17 - Lech L'cha (Go forth)

Genesis 12:1 (NAS)

Now the LORD said to Abram, "**Go forth** from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you ...

לֵךְ-לְךָ —*Go for yourself*. The call to separate oneself from homeland, birth-place and father's house constituted the first step toward the realization of Judaism. To be a Jew means to break with "the crowd" out of love for God and to accept the sacrifice of isolation ...<sup>1</sup>

The Divine command לֵךְ-לְךָ, go for yourself, is put at the head of Judaism. **It implies the will to go it alone with God if need be**. The idea of "majority rule" is indeed legitimate. But when the majority's values do not meet the criterion of Divine truth, man has the duty to separate himself and to remain "alone for himself" and with his God.

How could we have existed and how could we continue to exist if Abram had not given us the courage to be a minority?

Should Judaism be of the times. "Up-to-date Judaism!" The loudest protest against it is Judaism's first words, לֵךְ-לְךָ. **As soon as Abram appears, he stands in opposition to the spirit of the times**. Amidst a perverted, idolatrous, immoral society, idolizing power, almost completely wiping out the name of God, Abram willingly gives up all the family and social closeness so dear to people. **He becomes a bearer of God's message and throws a protest in the face of the gods worshiped by all the nations**. This demands courage and the deep conviction of the truth of the message itself. This demands an enduring consciousness of a messianic mission. This demands the Jewish conception of God, and Jewish confidence and boldness—in short, that obstinacy and persistence which characterizes the Jew (*R' Hirsch*).

### 1. 1Kings 18:20-29

<sup>20</sup>Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. <sup>21</sup>Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing. <sup>22</sup>Then Elijah said to them, "**I am the only one of the LORD's prophets left**, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. <sup>23</sup>Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. <sup>24</sup>Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god

who answers by fire—he is God." Then all the people said, "What you say is good." ... <sup>26</sup>So the (prophets of Baal) took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered ... <sup>28</sup>So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. <sup>29</sup>Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention ...

### a. 1Kings 19:9-18

<sup>9</sup>There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: "**What are you doing here, Elijah?**" <sup>10</sup>He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. **I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.**" <sup>11</sup>The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. <sup>12</sup>After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. <sup>13</sup>When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "**What are you doing here, Elijah?**" <sup>14</sup>He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. **I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.**" <sup>15</sup>The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. <sup>16</sup>Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha ... to succeed you as prophet. <sup>17</sup>Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. <sup>18</sup>**Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.**"

### Genesis 12:10

<sup>10</sup>Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.

וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ —*There was a famine in the land*. Why does the Torah often dwell on the description of unimportant events in the lives of Biblical personages? **The Torah wants to show us what their moral and religious**

1 Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah, Bereishis*, (Mesorah Publications, Ltd.), pp. 154-155.

attitudes were whern they were confronted with the problems and conflicts which everyone must face. The Torah prefers living examples of the behavior of holy people to moral treatises or discussion of religious principles. The general concept of the Bible demonstrates that more value is placed on **education through example than through lessons in ethics.**

1. Numbers 16:1-5

<sup>1</sup>Korah son of Izhar ... the son of Levi, and certain Reubenites ... became insolent <sup>2</sup>and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council. <sup>3</sup>They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD's assembly?" <sup>4</sup>**When Moses heard this, he fell facedown.** <sup>5</sup>Then he said to Korah and all his followers: "In the morning the LORD will show who belongs to him and who is holy, and he will have that person come near him. The man he chooses he will cause to come near him ...

2. Matthew 9:35-38

<sup>35</sup>Yeshua went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom **and healing every disease and sickness.** <sup>36</sup>**When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them,** because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup>Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup>Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

a. Matthew 14:13-21

<sup>13</sup>When Yeshua heard what had happened (to John), he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. <sup>14</sup>When Yeshua landed and saw a large crowd, **he had compassion on them and healed their sick.**

<sup>15</sup>As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

<sup>16</sup>Yeshua replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." <sup>17</sup>"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. <sup>18</sup>"Bring them here to me," he said. <sup>19</sup>And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. **Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves.** Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. <sup>20</sup>They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. <sup>21</sup>The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

The story of the famine in Canaan is to be considered in this light. Abram had just received the Divine command to leave Chaldea and to enter Canaan. Then, soon after his arrival, there is a famine, "worse than any other," as tradition tells us. **How will Abram react to it? Will he be mistrustful of God? Will he recriminate?** But Abram does not hesitate even for a moment. He accepts this new trial with the absolute faith of the righteous (אַמוּנָה שְׁלִמָּה). He accepts the famine and acts in a sensible way, which the Talmud makes explicit: "When famine breaks out, leave for another place ... even if it has its dangers" (Bava Kamma 60b). **Abram does not find it opportune to remain in Canaan waiting for a new miracle to save him and his family.** The one who was miraculously **saved from the fiery furnace, into which he was thrown for his love of God,** does not want to depend on a miracle when it is a case of the salvation of his own being. "One should not depend on miracles" (Pesachim 64b). Hence he takes all the rational steps to escape the calamity. Later on, when danger threatens Sarai, he will prefer to tell a half-truth than to rest passively in the expectation of a providential miracle.

3. Genesis Rabbah 38:11<sup>2</sup>

He (Terah) took him (Abraham) and gave him over to Nimrod. (Nimrod) said to him: Let us worship the fire! (Abraham) said to him: Should we not then worship water, which extinguishes fire! (Nimrod) said to him: Then, let us worship the water! (Abraham) said to him: Should we not then worship the clouds, which carry the water? (Nimrod) said to him: Then, let us worship the cloud! (Abraham) said to him: If so, Should we not then worship the wind, which scatters the clouds? (Nimrod) said to him: Then, let us worship the wind! (Abraham) said to him: Should we not then worship the human, who withstands the wind? (Nimrod) said to him: You are merely piling words; we should bow to none other than the fire. **I shall therefore cast you in it, and let your God to whom you bow come and save you from it!**

At the core of this story stands what appears to be a *derasha* on the name of Abraham's city, Ur of the Chaldeans (אֹּר כַּשְׁדִּים), **which was creatively interpreted by some ancient exegetes to mean literally אֹּר, fire or flames.** Thus, Gen. 15:7 was understood as saying, "I am the Lord who rescued you from the midst of the fire of the Chaldeans."

The nature of this fire was ... open to various interpretations, and some exegetes, doubtless inspired by the story of Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in Daniel (Dan 3:19-23), interpreted the phrase to mean that Abraham too was saved from a fiery furnace prepared by the Chaldeans to burn him.

In that story ... three young men—Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—are cast into a fiery furnace by Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, because of their refusal to worship an idol, and are eventually saved by God.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thetorah.com/article/why-the-midrash-has-abraham-thrown-into-nimrods-furnace>

#### 4. Matthew 16:1-4

<sup>1</sup>The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Yeshua and tested him **by asking him to show them a sign from heaven**. <sup>2</sup>He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' <sup>3</sup>and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. <sup>4</sup>**A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign**, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Yeshua then left them and went away.

a. A "sign" is *that by which something is known or distinguished*.

b. A miracle is an event in the external world brought about by the immediate agency or the simple volition of God, operating without the use of means capable of being discerned by the senses, and designed to authenticate the divine commission of a religious teacher and the truth of his message (Joh 2:18 Mt 12:38). **It is an occurrence at once above nature and above man**. It shows the intervention of a power that is not limited by the laws either of matter or of mind, a power interrupting the fixed laws which govern their movements, a supernatural power.

#### c. Deuteronomy 13:1-5

<sup>1</sup>If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a sign or wonder, <sup>2</sup>**and if the sign or wonder spoken of takes place**, and the prophet says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," <sup>3</sup>you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. <sup>4</sup>**It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him**. <sup>5</sup>That prophet or dreamer must be put to death for inciting rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. That prophet or dreamer tried to turn you from the way the LORD your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you.

#### Genesis 14:17-20

<sup>17</sup>After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). <sup>18</sup>Then **Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, <sup>19</sup>and he blessed Abram**, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. <sup>20</sup>And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

1. The first designation, given by Melchizedek, the "king of justice" (who is Shem, son of Noah), is "Salem," an allusion to peace. Later, Abraham will call this same place **הי יְרֵאָה** *HASHEM manifests Himself there* (22:14), But **God did not want to vex Shem the righteous nor Abram the righteous**, so He combined the two names and called the city **יְרוּשָׁלַיִם** (*Bereishit Rabbah* 56). So constituted, "Jerusalem" means, according to the Kabbalists, the place of "the perfect fear of God," since **יְרֵאָה** (will appear) and **יְרֵאָה** (fear) are homonyms.<sup>3</sup> But ... R' Isaiah Horowitz, points out that if the early name given by Abram precedes that given by Shem, although Shem came first, it is because **Jerusalem must designate the city where the Divine Majesty "will manifest Itself to the full" in the messianic era ...** (i.e.,) in order to stress that Jerusalem means **the city of the Divine revelation par excellence**." For R' S. R. Hirsch, Shalem was the city where the king, Shem son of Noah, wanted **צֶדֶק**, justice, to rule as an instrument of **שְׁלוֹם**, peace. The nations already had an old tradition that the future redemption of mankind would come through justice, and this tradition crystallized from earliest times in the city of Jerusalem "which is at the center of the inhabited world and which faces the temple of celestial spheres" (i.e., the "heavens" above) (Ramban), Radak adds: This is the city of peace which does not tolerate the reign of injustice and violence for long but disgorges its iniquitous (extremely immoral) inhabitants.

#### a. Genesis 14:18 (PJE)

<sup>18</sup>And Malki Tzedek, **who was Shem bar Noah**, the king of Yerushalem, came forth to meet Abram, and brought for (God Most High).

#### b. Psalms 110:1-7

<sup>1</sup>Of David. A psalm. The LORD says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." <sup>2</sup>The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion, saying, "Rule in the midst of your enemies!" ... <sup>4</sup>The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: **"You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."** <sup>5</sup>The Lord is at your right hand; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath. <sup>6</sup>He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth. <sup>7</sup>He will drink from a brook along the way, and so he will lift his head high.

#### c. Hebrews 7:1-17 (CJB)

<sup>1</sup>This Malki-Tzedek, king of Shalem, a *cohen* of God *Ha'Elyon*, met Avraham on his way back from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him; <sup>2</sup> also Avraham gave him a tenth of everything. Now first of all, by translation of his name, he is "king of righteousness"; and then he

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<sup>3</sup> Homonym—two words having the same spelling or pronunciation but different meanings and origins.

is also king of Shalem, which means "king of peace." **<sup>3</sup>There is no record of his father, mother, ancestry, birth or death; rather, like the Son of God, he continues as a *cohen* for all time.**

KJV, NAS, NIV—Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

<sup>4</sup>Just think how great he was! Even the Patriarch Avraham gave him a tenth of the choicest spoils. <sup>5</sup>Now the descendants of Levi who became *cohanim* have a commandment in the *Torah* to take a tenth of the income of the people, that is, from their own brothers, despite the fact that they too are descended from Avraham. <sup>6</sup>But Malki-Tzedek, even though he was not descended from Levi, took a tenth from Avraham. Also, he blessed Avraham, the man who received God's promises; <sup>7</sup>and **it is beyond all dispute that the one who blesses has higher status than the one who receives the blessing ...** <sup>9</sup>One might go even further and say that Levi, who himself receives tenths, paid a tenth through Avraham; <sup>10</sup>inasmuch as he was still in his ancestor Avraham's body when Malki-Tzedek met him.

<sup>11</sup>Therefore, if it had been possible **to reach the goal** through the system of *cohanim* derived from Levi (since in connection with it, the people were given the *Torah*), what need would there have been for another, different kind of *cohen*, the one spoken of as to be compared with Malki-Tzedek and not to be compared with Aharon? <sup>12</sup>For if the system of *cohanim* is transformed, there must of necessity occur a transformation of *Torah*. <sup>13</sup>The one about whom these things are said belongs to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar; <sup>14</sup>for everyone knows that our Lord arose out of Y'hudah, and that Moshe said nothing about this tribe when he spoke about *cohanim*.

<sup>15</sup>It becomes even clearer if a "different kind of *cohen*," one like Malki-Tzedek, arises, <sup>16</sup>one who became a *cohen* not by virtue of a rule in the *Torah* concerning physical descent, but by virtue of the power of an indestructible life. <sup>17</sup>For it is stated, "You are a *cohen* FOREVER, to be compared with Malki-Tzedek."

- d. **וְהוּא בְּהוּא לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן—He was a priest of God, the Most High.** Being one of Noah's sons, the king of Salem had survived the Flood in the Ark. He could have no doubts about the existence and omnipotence of the absolute Master of nature. Thus he became His earthly advocate; he became the priest of God supreme. **The bitter memory of the sinfulness before the Flood and the horrendous disaster which it brought about led him to build a society, at least in his own kingdom, based on the strict application of *צדק* justice.**

#### Genesis 15:2

<sup>2</sup>But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"

**אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה מֶה־תִּתְּנִי לִי—My Lord, HaShem/Elohim: What can you give me.** The cry of despair let us see into Abram's soul. What good were earthly possessions to Abram if a worthy child who would continue his work after him was denied to him? The attitude of the ancestor of the Jewish people toward children is that they are the most cherished of treasures. This has also remained the attitude of his descendants to this day. Within other societies of antiquity children had no rights, no protection, no human dignity; this was true even in the most enlightened of those societies. In Greece, weak children were left to die on lonely mountains. The Roman historian Tacitus deemed it a contemptible prejudice of the Jews that "it is a crime among them to kill any child." The Rabbis on the other hand spoke of little children as "the Messiah's of mankind." For them, the child represents the perpetual regenerative force in mankind, because in the child God continually gives humanity the chance to make good its mistakes, to improve its ways.

#### 1. Psalm 103:13

<sup>13</sup>As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him ...

#### a. Psalm 127:3-4

<sup>3</sup>Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him. <sup>4</sup>Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth.

#### b. Matthew 19:13-15

<sup>13</sup>Then people brought little children to Yeshua for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them.

<sup>14</sup>Yeshua said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." <sup>15</sup>When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

#### Genesis 15:4-6

<sup>4</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." <sup>5</sup>He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

**<sup>6</sup>Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.**

**וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לֹו צְדָקָה—And he reckoned it to him as righteousness.** The author of *Sefer Chofetz Chaim*<sup>4</sup> notes that Abram has recognized the Creator through

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<sup>4</sup> The *Sefer Chafetz Chaim* (or *Chofetz Chaim*) ("Desirer of Life") is the *magnum opus* of Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (1838-1933), who later became known simply as



his own powers of reasoning. But here the Torah's praise for him refers to his **אֱמוּנָה**, faith. Faith remains the essential foundation, the bedrock: The righteous man lives by his faith (*Habbukuk* 2:4). Consider one who is shipwrecked, who runs the risk of drowning, and sees a tree lying in the water, close to shore. He will try to catch hold of the trunk, not the branches. Now the Torah, which contains the object of our faith, is also **עֵץ־חַיִּים**, *the tree of life*, which we must seize by its "trunk," by its very essence.

1. Romans 4:1-25

<sup>1</sup>What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? <sup>2</sup>If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. <sup>3</sup>What does Scripture say? **"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness"** (**Gen 15:6**) <sup>4</sup>Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. <sup>5</sup>However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. <sup>6</sup>David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup>"Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. <sup>8</sup>Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them" (**Psa 32:2**) ...

<sup>16</sup>Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. <sup>17</sup>As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations" (**Gen 17:4**). He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not. <sup>18</sup>**Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed** and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be" (**Gen 15:5**). <sup>19</sup>Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead.

<sup>20</sup>Yet **he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God**, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup>being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

<sup>22</sup>This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness" (**Gen 15:6**). <sup>23</sup>The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, <sup>24</sup>but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Yeshua our Lord from the dead. <sup>25</sup>He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

2. Luke 10:25-26

<sup>25</sup>On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Yeshua. "Teacher," he asked, **"what must I do to inherit eternal life?"** <sup>26</sup>**"What is written in the Law?"** he replied. "How do you read it?"

3. Romans 7:7-12 (CJB)

<sup>7</sup>Therefore, what are we to say? That the *Torah* is sinful? Heaven forbid! Rather, the function of the *Torah* was that without it, I would not have known what sin is. For example, I would not have become conscious of what greed is if the *Torah* had not said, "Thou shalt not covet." <sup>8</sup>But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, worked in me all kinds of evil desires ... <sup>11</sup>For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me; and through the commandment, sin killed me. <sup>12</sup>So **the Torah is holy; that is, the commandment is holy, just and good.**

4. Makkot (Beatings) 23b-24a

R. Simlai when preaching said: Six hundred and thirteen precepts were communicated to Moses, three hundred and sixty-five negative precepts, corresponding to the number of solar days [in the year], and two hundred and forty-eight positive precepts, corresponding to the number of the members<sup>(40)</sup> of man's body ...

(40) Joints, or bones, covered with flesh and sinews (excluding the teeth).

David came and reduced them to eleven [principles] (*Psa* 15) ... Isaiah came and reduced them to six [principles] (*Isa* 33:15) ... Micah came and reduced them to three [principles] (*Micah* 6:8) ... Again came Isaiah and reduced them to two [principles], as it is said, Thus saith the Lord, [i] *Keep ye justice* and [ii] *do righteousness* [etc.] (*Isa* 56:1). Amos came and reduced them to one [principle], as it is said, *For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye Me and live* (*Amos* 5:4) ... **But it is Habakuk who came and based them all on one [principle], as it is said, But the righteous shall live by his faith** (*Hab* 2:4).