

GENESIS

A THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY

THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB

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ABRAM AND LOT SEPARATE (*GENESIS 13*)

When Abram returned to Canaan from his experience with Pharaoh in Egypt, he came back as a wealthy man. He still had his entire family with him, plus livestock and hard cash. So he now had the resources to live in Canaan without depending on anybody else's help. His God provided everything he and his family would need – an especially fitting situation, given the fact that the country he was settling down in was impoverished and yet he himself was well-taken care of.

His nephew Lot was still with him, but the time had come for the two men to separate. Although the LORD blessed them both, he blessed them in different ways – which will come out more clearly as the story proceeds.

Then the LORD revealed to Abram the true extent of what he was going to give him and his descendants.

Abram leaves Egypt – The wealth that Abram received in Egypt was quickly made, and easily made. Usually a man has to depend on his strength and skills to slowly build up enough for his family to live on. But Abram had more important things to do than to spend his time living in a foreign land. His family is about to grow, and they need to get acquainted with the land that the LORD will give them as their inheritance. And they need to get familiar with their God, for that matter – he has ways that they must learn; the Covenant terms must be worked out in the following generations; the Family will be separated out like “sheep and goats” as God selects the next generation to pass the inheritance on to.

So the LORD quickly took care of Abram's immediate needs (at Pharaoh's expense) and brought him back to Canaan to get to work on the Covenant. Remember, Abram is not getting any younger!

Back to Bethel – Bethel was right in the middle, geographically speaking, of the Promised Land, the land that would eventually become the inheritance of the

Tribes of Israel. Therefore it served as a starting point and a place for the Patriarchs to return to, as they interacted with the LORD about various aspects of their future inheritance.

This is significant because the name Bethel means “House of God.” It wouldn't actually be known by this name until the time of Jacob, when he has his dream there and sets up an altar. But the *idea* is being put on the map. Whether Abram knew it or not, this was the spot for *the House of God*, the place where God would appear to his heirs, the “point of entry” between Heaven and earth where the groundwork will be laid for the future heirs of Abram. Treasures of Heaven being brought by angels, the will of God going forth from this place, man in the presence of God serving as priest, the glory of God being revealed – Canaan (with Bethel being the doorway) is destined to be the one place on earth where God will step down and actually live among his people, the first time this has ever happened in history. Great things are going to happen in this land. No longer will the “god” dwell in some far-away place, unseen by men, puzzled

over by philosophers and religious experts. Here, Israel's God will reveal himself and make his presence known – to the great delight and blessing of his people, and to the consternation of his enemies. The *revelations* at Bethel will be a continuous activity between God and his people, the knowledge of God by direct experience, the beginnings of the Holy Scriptures through which alone we can know God as he is. It will form the very foundation of their faith in him.

Lot's wealth – We are not told whether Lot became wealthy through his own efforts, or simply because of his living with his uncle Abram to whom God gave riches wherever he went. At any rate, Lot evidently had so much that the two men formed communities of sorts, too large to occupy the same grazing area. It led to inevitable conflicts between the quarreling servants.

Lot's servants were loyal to him, whereas Abram's were loyal to him. There's nothing wrong with looking out for your master's business, but there's a lot wrong with a shortsightedness that can't see where the blessings are really coming from. Little did Lot's servants know that their good life would soon come to an end upon their separation from Abram. Abram was the LORD's chosen, the Heir of the Covenant; it's contact with, and proximity to, Abram that brings someone success.

Lot and Abram separate – When the conflict between Lot's servants and Abram's servants created a problem in the family, Abram decided that the time had come for Lot to go out on his own.

Note that this was a decision made by the head of the family. Lot has often been blamed for wanting to leave Abram; but it wasn't his idea. Probably Abram knew very well that Lot wasn't

included in the Covenant Promises, because Lot was the son of his brother Haran. The promises, however, were specifically for Abram and *his* descendants, not for anybody else. So it was time for Lot to make his own way, as God continued to work out the terms of the Covenant in Abram's life.

Perhaps it's this aspect of God's choosing the Heirs that bothers people the most. We tend to feel that God's blessings should be available to all, and he shouldn't – in fact he *wouldn't* – withhold good things from all of his creatures. The problem is that this false sense of God's grace doesn't conform to reality. The fact is that much of the world is suffering physically, most of it is in spiritual darkness, and very few are going to see the light of the next world. God's gifts, in particular his Covenant gifts, are specifically targeted for a single Family. The rest of humanity will find themselves outside in the dark with nothing in the end.

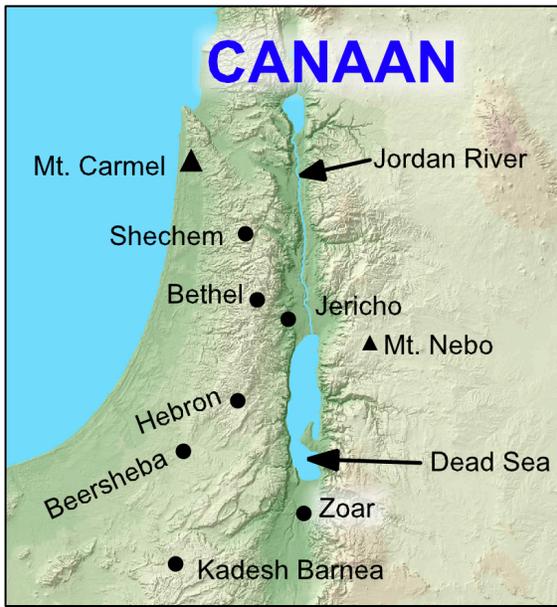
Most people (can we say all, in some sense?) experience the goodness of the Creator in this physical world. We don't get everything we want, but he has been amazingly gracious to us all in giving us things that we need to live: air, water, food, family, friends, jobs, peacetime, health, strength, wealth, insight, community – the list goes on. But he doesn't owe any of this to us; it's simply because he *is* a good God that we get anything from him.

But the Covenant is a different matter. Like it or not, it's only for the Family – a subset of humanity, and a small one at that. To inherit this, we have to prove our relationship back to the Founding Father, Abram himself. The Jews could prove their descent back to him physically, and therefore stood to inherit

the physical side of the Blessings. Lot, however, could prove no such thing; his heirs will get none of Abram's Covenant promises.

The Jordan River Valley – From where the two men stood discussing their problems – along the top of Canaan's mountain spine, between Bethel and Ai – they could see quite a ways in all directions. It's only 30 miles from there to the Mediterranean Sea, and Bethel is at a higher elevation than even Jerusalem, 10 miles to the south. So Lot had the perfect vantage point to choose his own territory.

Looking down into the Jordan River Valley to the east, he could see that it was "well watered" and perfect for raising livestock. So that's what he chose.



Lot has suffered no end of condemnation for this choice of his. The charges are 1) that he separated from his uncle; 2) that he deliberately picked what appealed to his "flesh" – a land full of water and grass "like the land of Egypt;" 3) he chose the land where the

Sodomites lived, a nation of notorious reprobates.

Before we address these charges, let me introduce you to the man.

... **Righteous** Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that **righteous** man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his **righteous** soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard.) (2 Peter 2:7-8)

Whatever modern students may think about Lot, the Apostle thought him to be such an exemplary figure of a righteous life that he calls him "*righteous ... righteous ... righteous*" in the same breath, a tribute that nobody else in Scripture is so blessed with.

We are going to discuss Lot in greater detail later on, but for now we have to get hold of the fact that modern commentators have done the man a great disservice, and shown their ignorance of the real situation. Their modern view is based on two things: *first*, a modern set of values and "morals" that don't fit into this ancient context; and *second*, a careless reading of the text – many are too ready to apply a prejudiced judgment to a story that will not support such incorrect assumptions. And that's why their assessment doesn't match at all with Peter's assessment.

Now to Lot's choice. *First*, it wasn't Lot's idea for the two of them to separate. It was Abram's idea. He was the elder of the two, and what he "suggested" was the law of the family, which Lot respected. If anybody should bear the "blame" of the two of them going separate ways, the responsibility must be laid at Abram's feet.

Second, if the land “appealed to his flesh,” it appealed to the flesh of his livestock much more. It’s no sin to choose abundant water and good grass for sheep and cattle! Again, it was Abram’s magnanimity to let his nephew choose his part of the land “flowing with milk and honey,” all of which was, after all, part of the Covenant promise in the first place. Besides, this area of the Jordan River was not outside the Covenant promise. In 400 years the descendants of Abram would come back and claim all the land surrounding, and west of, the Jordan River (in the tribal areas of Manasseh, Gad and Reuben). So Lot was actually choosing part of the land included in the Covenant. Nothing wrong with that either. We all choose a nice place to live to raise our families and have access to whatever resources we want or need for life; how then can we blame Lot for the same?

Third, the passage tells *us* about the Sodomites and their character, but this doesn’t mean that Lot or Abram knew much about them yet. We’re being told this as a “reader’s alert” – the land that Lot is about to move into will end up causing him a lot of trouble in the end. What is more likely is that, just like our neighbors, they seemed friendly enough on the first few visits talking about the weather across the fence. It was only after living with them for a while that their real nature came out. People rarely show us the monsters they really are on the first visit; they usually put on a show of being nice people – until it’s too late. Remember that Lot is going to end up with sleepless nights in great spiritual distress because of these people; Peter told us this. So he didn’t choose to live there *because* they were immoral, and neither was he insensitive to moral

issues, but rather he moved there in spite of the problem and in ignorance of it.

“All this is yours” – The real significance of Lot’s separation was this next step. When Lot had gone, the LORD repeated his promise to Abram that he would give the entire land to Abram and his descendants.

In other words, Lot is not one of the heirs of Abram. He *was* a nephew, and therefore will discover that it certainly pays to be related to the Covenant Heir. But in the end, Lot will not keep the land he chose, nor will his heirs. Lot’s descendants were Moab and Ben-Ammi (that’s another story), and both were to grow into nations of their own. But their territories were southwest of Palestine, outside of the tribal areas of the Israelites.

Abram, on the other hand, inherited all the area that we now know as Israel – the Promised Land. The LORD made a specific point to Abram: “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward” (which included, you will notice, the land to the east – the part that Lot chose). He could easily see much of it from his high point in Bethel. Then God told him to “Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.”

So Abram headed south to see his inheritance. There were at least five major roads through Canaan, all running north and south, that served as highways for travelers between Mesopotamia, Asia Minor and Egypt. One of them ran along the mountain spine itself. It connected the cities of Hazor (just north of the Sea of Galilee), Shechem, Bethel, Jerusalem, Hebron and finally Beersheba in the south. Along this ridge, then, Abram moved down to Hebron, looking

down both sides of the mountain at his vast inheritance.

It was immaterial to him (and to the LORD!) that he wasn't in possession of it yet. When the time came, the deed would be transferred from the Canaanites to the Israelites. What Abram did see, however, was the great potential behind this future land of his. Like a huge sign out front of a construction site – "FUTURE SITE OF ..." – the LORD's promise to give this land to his heirs spoke of great things to come, a project that would be centuries in the making, involving millions of people, and the welfare of nations. Abram could see the spiritual Kingdom of God coming *here*, on his land, in all its glory – a Kingdom that would address and finally solve the deep spiritual issues of mankind.

For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:10)

Canaan wasn't just a place to live; it was the site of the Temple where God and man would live together, where the wisdom and holiness and the Word of God would come forth upon the earth, it was the site of the Kingdom as the righteous King ruled in God's Name, it was the site of peace and prosperity through not only physical blessings but also spiritual resources. All these riches were not given to anybody else on earth, and no other place on earth was chosen to be the location for God's treasures – only here, in Canaan. "He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules." (Psalm 147:20) It is now a holy place, the "House of God," the point at which God and man will meet, reconcile, and live together in peace.

Abram saw all of this. We know also that he saw the great Son, the true Heir, who would enlarge the borders to include "all the sheep" who belong in the LORD's flock.

Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad. (John 8:56)

We know he saw the work of Christ because that was the whole purpose of the Covenant Promises as they were worked out in the Promised Land. Abram knew that the Heir of God would eventually come to lift the Promises up to a spiritual level.

Like the dust of the earth – What Abram was enabled to see was timeless, as the books of John and Galatians and Revelation testify. Revelation tells us what the promise of heirs being as numerous "as the dust of the earth" refers to.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. (Revelation 7:9)

Abram's physical descendants, though numbering in the millions over the centuries, were never the ultimate goal of God's Kingdom, since all believers (Gentiles included) were "chosen in [Christ] before the foundation of the world." (Ephesians 1:4) *That* is what multiplies the number of descendants exponentially, like the dust of the earth. As the LORD was explaining the Covenant to Abram, this larger spiritual Family is what he had in mind.

When we look at the picture on this scale, then, we understand better what the land of Canaan really was in God's

eyes. No wonder that Abram was looking forward to the spiritual city (see Revelation 21-22) which would house this great Family of which he was the Founder; he was shown the foundation of this great work in the seed form here in Palestine. Canaan would be the site of the first Temple, the physical Kingdom where the principles of living with God would get worked out on a physical level. But the day must come when the Heir would himself come from the Throne of God and set up a new Temple, on a chosen site in the middle of a new Promised Land, and gather God's children from the four corners of the world to the Feast at the Father's House – with Abram presiding.

So what Abram learned was that he was not only the Heir of the entire land, but he also had a great responsibility to proceed along the lines of the Promises and do what the LORD told him, so that the Covenant would be fulfilled for his future Family.

The Point – The LORD seemed intent on showing Abram three things.

- *First*, the true extent of Abram's inheritance. This was the purpose of the "guided tour" through Canaan. It was at this point that Abram got hold of the scope of what God had in mind for him and his descendants. It was both present and eternal, both physical and spiritual, involving both redemption and glory.
- *Second*, the exclusive nature of that inheritance. Watching Lot depart was a lesson in itself. Lot would prove to be problematic for Abram (not Lot's fault – he was simply in the wrong branch of the family), but the LORD was drawing the line on who was inside the legal Family

and who was outside. Lot would be blessed because of his relationship to Abram, but he wouldn't be able to keep anything that belonged rightfully to the heirs alone.

- *Third*, the extent of the Family who will inherit Abram's Covenant. This was not just a Jewish matter. Abram's Family would grow through the millennia, all over the world, to an uncountable number who will eventually take their rightful places at Abram's feet in the House of God.

It's like a second Creation. The Son is being given his inheritance by his Father, just as Adam and Eve were given the earth as their domain. Abram is a new beginning in the human race; from his loins would come new sons and daughters who would inherit a Creation in which sin and death will be finally destroyed, and the children of God will become righteous and live in the Light of Heaven. Here in Genesis 13, the Firstborn son was being shown his inheritance.

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