

Comments on Genesis 13

Abram is expelled from Egypt and moves into Canaan, foreshadowing trouble. The drought mentioned in the previous chapter is apparently still present, although apparently somewhat abated, hence the conflict in v. 7 over grazing. Had there been sufficient grazing for all of their cattle, there wouldn't have been a conflict that necessitated their parting company. However, note the land is effectively cleared of Canaanites, ct. 12:6. The Lord has cleared the Canaanites away by the drought, making it so the whole land is before them.

They decide to part company so as to not be in conflict over available grazing lands, and Lot fails to choose wisely, ultimately moving in with the locals who have not fled the land.

This chapter starts the cautionary tales occurring over the rest of the book of Genesis which are intended to discourage Israelites from intermingling with locals.

1 AND Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. 2 And Abram [was] very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. 3 And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; 4 Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.

v1-4 Abraham is expelled from Egypt (v. 1), but does so wealthy as a result of being bought off by Pharaoh (v. 2). He retraces his steps to return to the land the Lord promised him (v. 3-4).

v2 The Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary (JPS TC) on Genesis (Sarna, 1989) states:

Fulfilment of the divine blessing of 12:2 now begins. Abram enjoys great affluence, though how he acquired it is not stated. The possession of metals by pastoralists was particularly important in Canaan. In time of famine, silver and gold, being media of exchange, afforded a measure of security and protection. Although herding and animal husbandry would be their primary occupation, pastoral nomads would often supplement their resources by engaging in subsidiary gainful activities, including commerce. Silver or Gold are later mentioned in connection with the purchase of servants and a burial site and with the gifts sent to Isaac's future bride.

v3-4 Abraham returns to site built in 12:8 and goes through the

same ritual of invoking the Lord's name. Presumably this is to give thanks for leaving Egypt without Sarai being defiled and with considerable wealth.

5 And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. 6 And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. 7 And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. 8 And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we [be] brethren. 9 [Is] not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if [thou wilt take] the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if [thou depart] to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it [was] well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, [even] as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. 11 Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. 12 Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched [his] tent toward Sodom. 13 But the men of Sodom [were] wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.

v5-13 Affluence brings problems of its own, namely family strife (v. 7-8) and separation (v. 9-12). Here, Abram and Lot are doing so well materially the land cannot support all of their flocks (v. 5-6). Lot appears to not be so altruistic as Abraham as he chooses the most fertile land for himself (v. 11). This ultimately lands him in trouble though as he ends up living nearby Sodom, which is populated by some wicked sinners (v. 12-13).

The main issue in these verses is materialism, contention and how Abram deals with it so as to avoid serious problems. Abraham's solution is a magnanimous one, and he sets a good example in avoiding intra-family conflict.

14 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: 15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. 16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, [then] shall thy seed also be numbered. 17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. 18 Then Abram removed [his] tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which [is] in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.

v14-18 The covenant promise of land from 12:7 is reaffirmed, and Abram once again builds an altar as in 12:8 in token of the covenant.

v14 The Lord lifts up Abram's eyes and shows him all the surrounding lands as far as he can see, contrast this with v. 10 where Lot lifts up his own eyes and sees only the land of Jordan.

v17 "Arise, walk through the land", concerning this phrase, the JPS TC states:

Compare Joshua 24:3. Early Jewish exegesis (Targ. Jon.) understood this traversing of the length and breadth of the land to be a symbolic act constituting a mode of legal acquisition termed "hazakah" in rabbinic Hebrew. The validity of the formality is discussed in tannaitic sources in connection with this passage. The existence of this practice, on one form or another, is attested over a wide area of the ancient world. In both the Egyptian and Hittite spheres, the king had to undertake a periodic ceremonial walk around a field or a tour of his realm in order to symbolize the renewal of his sovereignty over the land. In Nuzi, in order to enhance the validity of property transfer, the former owner would "lift up his own foot from the property" and place the foot of the new owner on it. A reflex of this practice appears to lie behind the ceremony recounted in Ruth 4:7-9 and behind the phrasing of some Biblical passages relating to Israel's acquisition of its land, such as Deuteronomy 11:24 and Joshua 1:3. The same symbol of acquiring land by walking through it is also known from ancient Roman law.

So, the Lord is saying to Abram, "Go claim this land, because as far as I am concerned it's yours."

v18 The third altar built by Abram, note each altar and sacrifice occurs after some covenant promise by the Lord.

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