

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GENESIS 13

IN OUR LAST CHAPTER, WE WITNESSED THE CALL OF ABRAM. GOD CALLED THIS MAN OUT OF HIS LAND, AWAY FROM HIS FAMILY AND POINTING HIM TOWARDS AN UNKNOWN DESTINATION THAT THE LORD WOULD GUIDE HIM TOWARDS. ABRAM ARRIVES WITH HIS WIFE (SARAI), HIS NEPHEW LOT (WHO'S FATHER HAD DIED), AND THE OTHER MEMBERS OF HIS HUMAN AND LIVESTOCK CARAVAN. ABRAM HEADS TOWARDS CANAAN AND WILL LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS TREMENDOUS OFFER FROM THE LORD.

WHILE IN CANAAN THE LORD VISITS ABRAM AND TELLS HIM OF HIS PLANS. GOD WANTS TO BLESS AND FAVOR ABRAM AND GIVE THE LAND OF CANAAN TO BE THE POSSESSION OF ABRAM'S DESCENDANTS. HE PROMISES TO PROTECT HIM AND MAKE HIM ("HIS NAME") GREAT. ABRAM ONLY NEEDS TO BELIEVE THIS PROMISE FROM GOD AND FOLLOW GOD'S LEADING. AND THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT ABRAM DOES. AND THROUGH THIS WE LEARN ABOUT **FAITH**.

A FAMINE IN THE LAND WILL MOVE ABRAM'S CREW TO EGYPT WHERE WE DISCOVER THAT THE CALL OF GOD UPON ABRAM'S LIFE IS NOT BASED ON ABRAM'S PERFECT BEHAVIOR AND THROUGH THIS WE LEARN ABOUT **GRACE**. ABRAM AND SARAI ARE BANISHED FROM EGYPT AND HEAD BACK TOWARDS CANAAN. AND THAT BRING US TO GENESIS 13.

GENESIS 13:1-4 - ABRAM RETURNS TO CANAAN

ABRAM RETURNS TO THE LAND OF CANAAN, SPECIFICALLY TO THE PLACE WHERE GOD HAD FIRST APPEARED TO HIM (NEAR BETHEL). ABRAM RETURNS TO THE ALTAR HE HAD BUILT (GENESIS 12:7). THE WORD "BETHEL" LITERALLY MEANS "HOUSE OF GOD".

ABRAM'S RETURN TO THE ALTAR NEAR BETHEL IS A RETURN TO THE LORD IN MORE THAN JUST HIS PHYSICAL LOCATION. AT THE ALTAR HE "CALLS UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD" WHICH IS A BIBLICAL EXPRESSION OF WORSHIP AND PRAYER. THE TEXT DOESN'T GIVE INTIMATE DETAILS, BUT FOLLOWING THE INCIDENTS OF EGYPT WHERE ABRAM FEARED FOR HIS OWN LIFE (12:12-13) (NOT TO MENTION SARAI'S EXPERIENCE!), ONE CAN IMAGINE A RETURN TO THE ALTAR TO "CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD" WAS IN ORDER.

DURING THIS ERA THERE IS NO PERMANENT LOCATION FOR THE WORSHIP OF THE LORD, LIKE THERE WILL BE LATER AT JERUSALEM'S TEMPLE. ALTARS WOULD BE BUILT IN PERSONALLY SIGNIFICANT LOCATIONS AND IT WAS AT THESE ALTARS THAT THE LORD WOULD BE WORSHIPPED. NOAH GOT OFF THE ARK AND BUILT AN ALTAR. ABRAM IS CALLED BY THE LORD AND BUILDS AN ALTAR. THEY WOULD OFFER BURNT ANIMAL SACRIFICES ON THESE ALTARS OF WOOD AND STONE AS A "SACRIFICIAL OFFERING" OF THEIR GRATITUDE, OF THEIR WORSHIP AND THEIR RECOGNITION OF THE LORD AND HIS POWER/PROMISE.

V. 2 - ABRAM WAS VERY RICH - GOD HAS ALREADY BEGUN TO "BLESS" ABRAM WITH MATERIAL BLESSINGS OF LIVESTOCK, SILVER AND GOLD. THIS IS NOT THE ONLY WAY ABRAM IS "BLESSED", BUT IT IS ONE WAY. SOME OF THIS WEALTH CAME THROUGH THE HAND OF THE EGYPTIANS WHO GAVE ABRAM MANY THINGS WHEN HE UNKNOWINGLY "BORROWED" ABRAM'S WIFE FOR A SEASON (12:6). NEVERTHELESS, ABRAM HAS ACCUMULATED THIS WEALTH AND IT WILL ACTUALLY AFFECT HIS FUTURE PLANS AS WE WILL NOW SEE.

GENESIS 13:5-13 LOT & ABRAM SEPARATE

THE COMPANY OF ABRAM AND LOT IS APPARENTLY BURSTING AT THE SEAMS. THEIR HERDS WERE GROWING, THEIR PEOPLE MULTIPLYING. AND THERE SEEMS TO NOT BE ENOUGH ROOM OR RESOURCES FOR BOTH GROUPS. AND WHILE THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE AND ANIMALS AND NOT A LOT OF ROOM TO MOVE AND GRAZE - THERE IS PLenty OF ROOM FOR STRIFE.

ABRAM INITIATES A CONVERSATION WITH LOT TO WORK TOWARDS A STRIFE-FREE RELATIONSHIP AN OFFERS LOT THE CHANCE TO CHOOSE WHERE HE WOULD LIKE TO GO. ABRAM COMES ACROSS AS A KIND AND GRACIOUS MAN IN THIS EXCHANGE. LOT ACCEPTS ABRAM'S OFFER AND CHOOSES TO MOVE TOWARDS THE LAND THAT LOOKED FERTILE AND WAS WELL WATERED - - IMPORTANT QUALITIES IF YOU'VE GOT AN ABUNDANCE OF LIVESTOCK.

THE TEXT TELLS US THAT THIS GOOD LOOKING LAND WAS "LIKE THE GARDEN OF THE LORD". IT WAS NEAR THE CITY OF SODOM AND "THE PEOPLE OF THIS AREA WERE EXTREMELY WICKED AND CONSTANTLY SINNED AGAINST THE LORD." (GENESIS 13:13 NLT). WE'LL CONSIDER THE WISDOM OF LOT'S CHOICE BELOW, BUT FOR NOW WE SEE ABRAM AND LOT WORKING TO SOLVE THEIR PROBLEM AND EVENTUALLY SPLITTING UP, HOPING THAT WILL KEEP THE PEACE.

GENESIS 13:14-18 - THE PROMISE EXPANDS

ABRAM AND LOT HAVE NOW GONE THEIR SEPARATE WAYS AND ABRAM FINDS HIMSELF IN THE LESS FERTILE LAND OF CANAAN IN THE REGION ON HEBRON. HE PITCHES HIS TENT NEAR THE "OAKS OF MAMRE" WHICH WERE LIKELY SOME SORT OF NOTABLE GROUPING OF TREES THAT PROVIDED A POINT OF REFERENCE TO WHERE ABRAM WAS.

WHILE HE IS THERE THE LORD SPEAKS TO ABRAM AGAIN AND EXPANDS THE PROMISE HE ORIGINALLY MADE IN GENESIS 12.

GOD'S PROMISE (GENESIS 12:2-3)

- 1 - I (GOD) WILL MAKE (FROM) YOU A GREAT NATION
- 2 - I (GOD) WILL BLESS YOU
- 3 - I (GOD) WILL MAKE YOUR NAME (ABRAM) GREAT
- 4 - YOU (ABRAM) WILL BE A BLESSING
- 5 - I (GOD) WILL BLESS THOSE PEOPLE WHO BLESS YOU
- 6 - I (GOD) WILL CURSE THOSE PEOPLE WHO CURSE YOU
- 7 - THROUGH YOU (ABRAM), ALL OF THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH WILL BE BLESSED

GOD'S PROMISE [EXPANDED] (GENESIS 13:14-17)

- 8 - I (GOD) WILL GIVE YOU (ABRAM) ALL THE LAND YOU SEE (N,S, E & W)
- 9 - I (GOD) WILL GIVE THIS LAND TO YOUR (ABRAM'S) DESCENDANTS FOREVER
- 10 - I (GOD) MAKE YOUR (ABRAM'S) DESCENDANTS INNUMERABLE, AS THE DUST OF THE EARTH

THIS IS AN "EXPANSION" OF THE ORIGINAL PROMISE IN A FEW WAYS. FIRST, GOD IS NOW CLARIFYING ~~WHICH~~ LAND HE IS GIVING TO ABRAM. IT APPEARS TO BE AT LEAST A PORTION OF LAND HE IS CURRENTLY RESIDING IN, CANAAN. ALL THE LAND THAT ABRAM COULD "SEE" (13:14-15) AND THAT WOULD "WALK ABOUT" (13:17) IS THE LAND GOD IS GIVING TO HIM.

SECONDLY, GOD CLARIFIES WHAT IT MEAN THAT ABRAM WOULD BE A "**GREAT NATION**" (GENESIS 12:2) - APPARENTLY THIS HAS TO DO WITH *LITERAL* DESCENDANTS AS OPPOSED TO JUST A LOT OF PEOPLE IN GENERAL, PERHAPS THE LARGE COMPANY HE IS TRAVELING WITH. GOD SPECIFICALLY SAYS THAT THIS LAND WILL BE GIVEN TO ABRAM AND HIS "**DESCENDANTS**" (HEBREW: *ZE'ER* MEANING "SEED" OR "OFFSPRING"). AND THEN GOD ADDS THAT THIS GIFTING IS "**FOREVER**".

CAN WE PAUSE FOR A SECOND AND REMEMBER AN IMPORTANT DETAIL: **ABRAM DOESN'T HAVE ANY KIDS.**

WHAT DOES ABRAM BELIEVE ABOUT THIS? DOES HE UNDERSTAND THAT GOD MUST BE PROMISING HIM TO HAVE CHILDREN? DOES HE NOT UNDERSTAND THIS PART OF THE PROMISE? HAS HE REINTERPRETED "DESCENDANTS" AS RELATIVES AND NOT DIRECT BIOLOGICAL CHILDREN AND CHILDREN'S CHILDREN? WE DON'T KNOW. BUT WE CAN CERTAINLY IMAGINE WHAT MUST HAVE BEEN GOING THROUGH ABRAM'S HEAD AS HE HEARS THE MOST DIRECT WORD ON THIS CURIOUS SUBJECT.

AS WE BUTTON UP THE THEOLOGICAL SIDE OF THINGS, LET'S CONSIDER WHAT THIS ABRAHAMIC PROMISE IS DOING FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE. GOD CREATED THE WORLD AND GAVE IT TO ADAM AND EVE. HE BLESSED THEM AND TOLD THEM TO BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY. ADAM AND EVE SINNED, THE WORLD IS CURSED AND GOD'S ORIGINAL PLAN IS PUT ON "PAUSE" AS HE WORKS FOR RECONCILIATION WITH HUMANITY, CREATURES SO OFTEN PRONE TO REBEL.

SO GOD CALLS ABRAM AND SAYS "ABRAM, I WANT TO BLESS YOU AND THE WHOLE WORLD THROUGH YOU." HE NOW TELLS ABRAM THAT HE'S GIVING HIM AND HIS PEOPLE A PORTION OF THIS EARTH (LAND) FOREVER. AND THESE PEOPLE, WILL BE INNUMERABLE, LIKE THE DUST OF THE EARTH. IN OTHER WORDS, ABRAM, I WILL MAKE YOU FRUITFUL AND WILL MULTIPLY YOU ON THE EARTH.

WHILE WE DON'T HAVE ALL OF THE SCOPE OR DETAILS OF WHAT WILL BECOME GOD'S FULL PLAN OR RESTORATION, THE CLEAR AND INTENTIONAL SEEDS OF THAT RESTORATION ARE BEING PLANTED HERE.

THAT'S THE THEOLOGY. NOW LET'S CONSIDER THE PRACTICAL INSPIRATION OF THIS CHAPTER.

ONE OF THE GREAT LESSONS COMES FROM THE RECORD OF LOT AND ABRAM'S SEPARATION. HERE'S THE LESSON: **THINGS AREN'T ALWAYS AS GOOD AS THEY SEEM.** MOST BIBLE READERS SEE LOT'S CHOICE TO LIVE NEAR SODOM AS A *BAD* CHOICE. LOT MOVES TO SODOM! EVEN IF YOU AREN'T FAMILIAR WITH WHAT HAPPENS A FEW CHAPTERS LATER (SODOM IS DESTROYED FOR IT'S INCREDIBLE EVIL), THE NARRATOR LETS YOU KNOW "*THIS WAS BEFORE THE LORD DESTROYED SODOM AND GOMORRAH*" (13:10). WE'RE READING ALONG AND YELLING INTO THE BOOK "NO, LOT, DON'T DO IT!" LIKE WE WOULD AT THE MOVIE SCREEN WHEN WE SEE A CHARACTER OPENING THE WRONG DOOR OR TURNING DOWN THE WRONG ROAD. BUT OF COURSE LOT CAN'T HEAR US AND HE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT WE KNOW. NEITHER DOES ABRAM FOR THAT MATTER.

SOMETIMES THE ROAD GOD WANTS US TO WALK DOWN IS THE ONE THAT LOOKS "GOOD". THE LAND THAT IS "WELL WATERED" IS THE OBVIOUSLY THE "BETTER" CHOICE AND SO IT'S THE "GOD-CHOICE" RIGHT? MAYBE. MAYBE NOT. SOMETIMES THE ROAD THAT GOD WANTS US TO WALK DOWN IS THE ONE THAT DOESN'T LOOK AS "GOOD" BECAUSE HE IS THERE AND HAS BETTER THINGS FOR US IN THAT PLACE. OUR TEMPTATION IS TO THINK THAT THINGS THAT LOOK GOOD ARE RIGHT AND THINGS THAT DON'T LOOK AS GOOD AREN'T RIGHT.

SODOM LOOKED LIKE THE BETTER CHOICE. **BUT IT WASN'T.** HEBRON LOOKED LIKE THE WRONG CHOICE. **BUT IT WASN'T.** AND THE REASON WHY IS BECAUSE GOD WAS IN HEBRON, AND HE WASN'T IN SODOM. WE LOOK AT HOW "WELL WATERED" A PLACE IS - HOW SMOOTH THINGS ARE WORKING, HOW HAPPY PEOPLE SEEM TO BE, WHERE THERE IS ABUNDANCE OR PROSPERITY AND WE ASSUME IT'S WHERE GOD IS. BUT GOD IS NOT LOOKING AT THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE OF THE PLACE, HE IS LOOKING AT THE HEART OF THE MATTER AND WHAT IS BEST FOR OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM, NOT OUR COMFORT ZONES. SODOM LOOKED GOOD ON THE OUTSIDE, BUT WAS A PLACE OF DEATH ON THE INSIDE AND FOR MANY, THAT REALITY ISN'T CLEAR UNTIL IT'S TOO LATE.

THE LAND ABRAM CHOSE WAS THE LAND *GOD CHOSE* FOR HIM. IT WAS IN THE LAND OF CANAAN THAT GOD AGAIN VISITED WITH ABRAM AND EXPANDED THE GREAT ABRAHAMIC PROMISE.

LOT "LIFTED UP HIS EYES AND SAW" (13:10). THE LORD LIFTED ABRAM'S EYES UP TO 'LOOK" (13:14). LOT SAW WHAT THE LAND BEFORE HIM WAS LIKE. ABRAM SAW WHAT THE FUTURE BEFORE HIM WAS GOING TO BE.

THE QUESTION WE MUST ASK IS "GOD, WHERE DO YOU WANT ME TO GO?" "LORD, WHERE DO YOU WANT ME TO BE". "FATHER, WHERE ARE YOU LEADING ME". AND WE MAKE OUR DECISIONS BASED ON THE ANSWER TO THOSE QUESTIONS.

WHEN YOU LOOK AROUND AT WHERE YOU ARE GOING TO GO WITH YOUR LIFE, THERE MIGHT LOOK LIKE THERE IS A BETTER JOB OUT THERE, THERE MIGHT LOOK LIKE THERE IS A BETTER RELATIONSHIP OUT THERE, THERE MIGHT LOOK LIKE THERE IS A BETTER CHURCH OUT THERE, THERE MIGHT LOOK LIKE THERE IS A BETTER WAY TO FIND JOY OUT THERE, THERE MIGHT LOOK LIKE THERE IS A BETTER WAY TO FIX YOUR PROBLEMS OUT THERE...

BUT JUST BECAUSE IT "LOOKS" BETTER DOESN'T MEAN IT IS BETTER. WHAT MATTERS IS WHERE GOD IS. AS THE FAMOUS LINE GOES "LOOKS CAN BE DECEIVING." INDEED. HOWEVER, COMMITTING, LIKE ABRAM, TO FAITHFULLY FOLLOW AND OBEY THE LORD, IN SPITE OF WHAT IT MIGHT "LOOK LIKE" IS *ALWAYS* BETTER. ALWAYS.