

Genesis Chapters 12-14 Abram to Lot

[NKJV Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

Hello, and welcome to the latest in our series on the book of Genesis. Today we are looking at chapters 12, 13 and 14 in respect of Abram and Lot. It is often said that Genesis is sometimes referred to as the seed plot of the scriptures as it teaches us many principles upon which the rest of the Bible is based and its details elaborated on. As well as the Creation itself, Genesis teaches us about the introduction of sin, the need for sacrifice, marriage, judgement, faith and much more. All things that are expanded upon in the New Testament. It is often said that the New Testament is in the Old contained, but the Old is in the New explained. So, as we look today at historical facts, I trust we will not only see practical lessons from them, but also a spiritual application of them. We should never live in the past, but we should remember that the past is for reference not for residence. For the sake of time today I will not read all three chapters, but it will be helpful if you have your Bible open at them as I will refer to the verses as we go through, and all quotations will be from the NKJV unless otherwise stated.

I would like to begin today with the opening nine verses of chapter 12 in respect of God's promises to Abram. It is worth noticing though that in verse 1 we read,

“Now the LORD had said to Abram.”

If we only had Genesis we would be confused as to when God had actually told Abram this, but, as we said earlier the Old is in the New explained, and we read in Acts chapter 7 verse 2 that the God of Glory had appeared to Abram when he still lived in Mesopotamia, before he had moved to Haran, and had told him that he was to leave and journey in faith to a place that God would show him. So here we have at the very outset of our consideration an explanation of how by the inspiration of the Spirit, the New Testament writers, in this case Luke, give us a fuller picture of something that happened so long-ago which Luke could never have known by natural means. So as we get into chapter 12, Abram's obedience to God's call had already begun. Abram with his father, his wife, his nephew and all his flocks and animals had journeyed from Ur of the Chaldeans along the banks of the Euphrates and had arrived at Haran and verse 31 of Genesis chapter 11 tells us that they dwelt there. Abram's father Terah died in Haran, and it was only then that Abram was able to truly follow God's call to him. He had been told to leave his father's house and while he had done this physically because he had taken his father with him it would suggest he had not done this in his heart.

Did he still have the things of Ur in his heart even though he had left them? How much like this we can sometimes be when natural things can allow us to experience and become far less than God wants us to be. God too has made us many promises which have the potential to bless us, but we can easily lose the full enjoyment of them when we allow earthly considerations to cloud our judgement or stunt our faith. If Abram's soul was fully under the power of what God was calling him to in Canaan he would never have stayed at Haran and we too can be like this unless we fully

understand that our home, our portion, our hope, and our inheritance are now above in Heaven where Christ sits at God's right hand.

The first three verses of chapter 12 give us God's call to Abram, which is an everlasting covenant containing four elements. These promises are unconditional, but it is vitally important to realise that the fulfilment of them has been delayed until a day still future because of the failure of the generations of Israelites that followed and their ultimate refusal to accept their Messiah when they cried, "Away with Him." We must appreciate that when Christ was crucified, the basis upon which God dealt with all mankind, whether Jew or Gentile, changed forever. This means that the way of Salvation and the way to receive all the blessings of God no longer depends on the adherence to the Law as given to Moses and the keeping of the religious ceremonies that accompanied it. It is now solely based on the sacrificial death of Christ on Calvary's cross. The four elements of this covenant given to Abram were therefore seed, nation, land, and divine blessing and protection. These are earthly blessings, but the blessing of the Christian believer is a heavenly one although many blessings do flow from this that we can enjoy in this life now. So, through the Cross of Christ, a third category of people have been brought into play, that being the Church of God. As far as God is concerned there are three groups of people, the Jews, the Gentiles and the Church of God. The Church of God is made up from people who were once either Jews or Gentiles. These promises made to Abram that we are looking at in Genesis 12 will still be brought to pass in actuality, but the promises to the Church of God are entirely different. We should never consider the Church of God as just a replacement of the Children of Israel, the promises and subsequent blessings to each are very different and unique as we can see throughout many books of the New Testament, principally the Epistle to the Hebrews.

We are not told how long they lived in Haran, but the point came in Abram's life that after the natural ties, which had perhaps hindered him before his father's death, had now gone, Abram moves to fully enter into the promises of God had made to him. God did not drag Abram out of Haran but rather he was drawn by God's promises and that is still the same way that God would deal with us today. Even in initial salvation, we have free will, but God draws us by His matchless Grace. We can only ever enter our own 'spiritual promised land' if we fully appreciate what that is. We read in verse 6 that Abram arrived at a place called Shechem, a town that lies in the valley between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, according to Deuteronomy chapter 27, this lies approximately 15 miles West of the Jordan and 30 miles north of Jerusalem.

Verse 6 closes by simply telling us that other people already lived there. Verse 7 tells us that God reinforced His promise to Abram and that seems to have captured Abram's heart as he then builds an altar in order to worship God before he considers even building shelter for himself and his family. He seems to have had a true appreciation of what was most important. In the same way, our appreciation of what God has done for us through Christ and His subsequent promises should draw from our hearts worship as well. "This land" was not just for Abram's immediate benefit, the whole of God's dealing with mankind flowed from "this land" and will still in the future. Hence Abram's obedience, or lack of it in some situations, together with that of his generations that followed, are so important for us to learn from today.

It is also very worth noting that in verse 7 that the LORD is turning Abram's focus away from the fact that there was already opposition in the land to the fact of what the LORD was promising him. We as Christians will always have opposition to a greater or lesser degree, but we always must remember Paul's words to the Ephesians, chapter 6 verse 12, that we wrestle against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places. We can surely see this even in the laws that are being passed and the things that are accepted that would have been unthinkable only a few years ago. So, like Abram, we must focus on our covenant-making God and not on the world around us.

In the final section of chapter 12 from verse 10 to the end we have a very sad story that I would like to put a title over to help us learn from it:

How do we react when things go wrong or pressure builds?

In verse 10 we read that there was a great famine in Canaan and so Abram decided to continue southward and go into Egypt. We are not told that the LORD had instructed Abram to move on from the land that God had promised him, but we must appreciate that the God of Creation had allowed the famine to come. So Abram's decision to move to Egypt in order to protect his family and wealth was entirely rational from a natural and earthly point of view but not from a faith-related-point-of-view. (Many hundreds of years later, Moses would say of Egypt that it was better to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season in Egypt.) So Abram moves out of the sphere of God's intended blessing and makes a terrible error of judgement. Abram tells a lie in relation to his wife Sarai and that results in her being taken into Pharaoh's harem. However, the LORD intervenes, verse 17 tells us,

“He plagued Pharaoh...because of Sarai.”

and Abram and Sarai escape with all their wealth untouched. So the earthly perspective might say everything worked out well, so it was the right thing to do but as people of faith we should always be more desiring to enjoy the presence and communion of God than to have material benefits. It is worth noting that we do not read of Abram having made an altar during this period. As Christians we should not simply think that the end justifies the means.

Now when we go into chapter 13, all 18 verses of this short chapter give us a situation that is the exact opposite of what we have just seen in the latter half of chapter 12. In Egypt, things were not going well, and Abram made a bad decision. In the plains of the land now, things were going well, and decisions were also required to be made. I want to put the title over this section then as:

How we react when things are going well?

Unlike in the previous chapter Abram, shows great wisdom in the decision he made, and this correct choice all comes from the fact that he was now restored in his communion with the LORD. It is vital to notice in verses 3 and 4 that Abram returned to the place he had previously left to go to Egypt, Bethel, and there he returned to the altar he had previously made. It was there that he once again was able to call upon the name of the LORD. He had previously made an error of judgement at a time when he was away from the LORD and this could have easily turned him away for good, but no, he has the humility and desire to go back, retrace his steps, admit he was wrong, and in God's matchless grace he is restored. It is part of the eternal character of God that He desires repentance from His people and he will give grace as a result. Think of how King David was restored after his great sin or the Apostle Peter after he had actually denied even knowing the Lord three times. In John's first epistle chapter 1 verse 9 we read,

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

This is not an easy thing to do for some people as it requires us to admit that we have gone our own way that is unacceptable to a Holy and Righteous God. But it is the very foundation of Christianity and the only way for us to enjoy communion with God and the full blessing that He seeks to bring us into. This in effect is what Abram did when he returned to Bethel.

We see in chapter 13 that the flocks and animals of Abram and Lot had grown so much that there was too much conflict between their herdsmen for them to continue together so Abram decided they should separate, and he gave his nephew Lot the first choice as to where he wanted to go. Again, real grace and kindness was shown by Abram who could have easily exercised his position as head of the family and made his choice first. But he doesn't, he is now entirely confident in his relationship with the LORD that whichever direction Lot chooses, God will go with Abram in the other direction. There are two things about Lot that are worth keeping in mind.

Firstly, we have no Old Testament evidence that Lot shared his uncle's faith. Were it not for Peter's second epistle chapter 2 verse 7 where he refers to Lot as being righteous, we would have never known.

Secondly, therefore, it is no surprise that Lot's decision was based on what he saw with his own eyes rather than the leading of the LORD.

Verses 12 and 13 give us some insight into the danger of the decision that Lot made and the lack of spiritual discernment he used in making it. It would seem he wanted to get as close as he could to Sodom despite of the awful wickedness and sin against the LORD that was evident there and we know from the passage just referred to in Peter's second epistle that this actually tormented Lot's righteous soul every day. How awful that must have been for him, so let us never get so close to the evil and sinfulness of this world that we experience such a thing, this is far from victorious living. We will see in the next chapter the terrible result for Lot of the decision he made, what a contrast to the result of Abram's decision that we see from verse 14 to the end of chapter 13.

The LORD reaffirms His promise to Abram that from where he currently stood as far as he could see in every direction that land would belong to him and his descendants forever. The LORD also gives him the promise as to how innumerable his descendants would become. As we referred to earlier, this covenant still holds true but during the period we are currently in, the Church Period, the natural descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have been lost among the nations to the greater extent due to the carrying away of the ten Northern tribes and they have been sidelined as the focus of God's attention due to their refusal of Christ as the true Messiah of God.

It is worth keeping in the mind that the division among the twelve tribes of Israel which resulted in the carrying away of the Northern tribes was caused by a rebellion against King Rehoboam after his father King Solomon died. We can read about this in First Kings chapter 12. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained true to the King Rehoboam, but the other ten tribes sided with Jeroboam and the nation was divided. The southern kingdom from that time became Judah and the northern kingdom retained the name Israel, but they have never been united since that time. Just to remind ourselves, we read in Second Kings chapter 17 of the Assyrians taking over the city of Samaria which was the capital of the northern kingdom, Israel, in approximately 722 B.C.

The people of that region were dispersed to various distant places. In Second Kings chapter 24 we read of King Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, doing a similar thing to the southern kingdom of Judah, whose capital was Jerusalem. This took place in approximately 597 B.C. However, there was a major difference in the Babylonian overthrow of Jerusalem in that the majority of the rulers and leaders of the city were taken as a group to Babylon, not dispersed to various places, and therefore this allowed the remnant of Judah to return to Jerusalem in the days of Ezra. We can see from Revelation chapter 7 and Romans chapter 11 that all saved Israel will be brought back together again but this will not be until a future day at the end of the tribulation period and then they will once again be the true witness to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that they were meant to be. It is worth noting also that both the carrying away of Samaria by the Assyrians and that of Jerusalem by the Babylonians were allowed of God because of the failure of the kings of that time.

After this brief historical digression let us get back to our story in hand. The first 17 verses of Genesis chapter 14 tell us about a great strife that took place between four kings on one hand and another five kings on the other. The result of this long difficulty was that the four kings under Chedorlaomer prevailed and overpowered Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot was caught up in this and all his household was taken captive, but Abram was not directly involved because of the choices each of them had made in chapter 13. How does Abram respond to Lot's situation? After all, Abram could have rightly said that Lot had brought this on himself because he chose to go toward

Sodom and to be integrated in all its ways. So, as we have already thought about how we react when things go wrong and when things go right, I now want to put a title over this portion of:

How should we react and help when other people make a wrong choice that brings them into serious difficulty?

A survivor of the battle goes to find Abram and tells him about what has happened to Lot. There is a lovely point here that may help us to answer the question I have just raised. In verse 12 Lot is correctly referred to as Abram's brother's son, his nephew, but in verse 14 he is referred to as Abram's brother. It appeals to me that while others seen the correct earthly relationship of Lot to Abram, Abram himself viewed Lot as more than just a relative through flesh. How do we view our brothers and sisters in Christ? We also do well to expand this concern to those who may not be Christians now but are still loved by the God who desires their salvation and eternal blessing. Abram was intent on rescuing Lot even at great risk and expense to himself.

There is also an interesting point in verse 13, where we see Abram referred to as a Hebrew. This is the first time this name is used, and it means 'descended from Eber.' Thereafter, foreigners used this in referring to Israelites and Israelites used it of themselves when in the company of foreigners.

So Abram the Hebrew defeats the four kings and rescues Lot and all his household. It was quite a rescue as verse 15 tells us that Abram had pursued those kings north of Damascus, that is, approximately 150 miles north of the Dead Sea. On his return he is met by Bera, the king of Sodom and also the king of Salem, Melchizedek. Two very different characters with two very different agendas. Bera offered Abram material gain from his victory while Melchizedek only sought to give Abram encouragement and blessing. Abram was very forthright in refusing the offer of the king of Sodom, he in no way wanted to be in the debt of someone with such a background. Do you and I seek the applause, approval, or even material excess, from the ungodly in exchange for our own righteousness or moral steadfastness?

Melchizedek's name means "righteous king" and he was a king-priest over ancient Jerusalem. The title King of Salem means 'King of Peace.' His position was so great that Abram was able to accept the blessing of God from him, but he also gave him a tithe of all that he had. Hebrews chapter 7 describes how this person, Melchizedek is a type of Christ. It details the fact that, because we are not told of his mother, father, genealogy, beginning or ending of his life, he is like unto the Son of God. As such he remains therefore a priest forever, and so as an ever-abiding priest he is a type of Christ. In v.17, the writer of the Hebrews then quotes from Psalm 110 verse 4 which ratifies this very thing. In Genesis 14: 18-20, the blessing of Abram by Melchizedek refers to God as,

"God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth."

This then strengthens and prepares Abram to deal with the King of Sodom's entreaty and so we also should appreciate the blessing of this same Most High God and learn that we need nothing from the god's of this world.

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