

...to thy seed forever.

Here we see the promises of God being given to Abram, when he is told that the very land he lives in as a traveller is now his own. He was by now a very rich man, living in a tent and owning herds and flocks, gold and silver. He has not yet attained a status of ruler, but that does not stop God!

When God gives us promises there are no prerequisite actions that make us worthy to receive them. We must certainly obey, but our obedience is not what causes God to promise us anything. His promises are known to Him in eternity, just like our salvation. Therefore, nothing can prevent Him from making those promises and nothing can cause Him to remove them (unless He Himself declares conditions). He may impose sanctions and requirements once they are given, but these do not decide His actions. He either promises or He does not.

In this case, we see a much chastened Abram. He had just escaped with his life after making a fool of a king! He had lied hugely. Yet, here was God giving him promises that will never be repeated to any man. Abram did not 'deserve' them – they were made by God simply because He wished to make them.

We also see two major modern applications. We have Abram, who must have felt lonely and frustrated when his servants argued with Lot's servants, making him feel forced to divide the family into two factions. Then, he moved away from the area he initially decided to settle in, after his nephew chose the land he wished to occupy. But, the split and the move had consequences, and Abram moved to the land already designated to him by God. That is, what seemed to be the result of a family argument was really the result of God's plan and actions.

Then we have Lot, who thought his choice of land was good. He looked at all the apparent advantages, saw the lovely thronging cities, and thought he had made the best choice. He discovered to his cost that we ought not choose according to appearance. No Christian should accept anything at face value, not even the greeting, 'brother'.

If we are open to God, we will not be swayed by outward appearances, nor will we be dismayed by what is apparently a bad result. Trusting in God is not tied to these external things, but is dependent on our inward acceptance of whatever God puts our way.

Genesis 13

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Many times these things might seem to be bad, or might not be what we would have chosen. But, God's plans begin before we are born, and many seemingly disparate activities and people may be used by Him to bring about that plan. So, do not be preoccupied by what you see.

Verses 1-4

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.”

We are not told Abram's reaction to being found out by Pharaoh (though he probably experienced burning humiliation and shame). We are simply told that he left Egypt and called upon God when he reached the altar he had built previously. We can be assured that he left under a cloud, so it might be that he called upon God (Jehovah) in misery and repentance. But, we are not told that, either; we can only guess.

From Egypt, Abram took his wife, Lot and everyone/everything else, 'into the south'. Logically this should mean south of Egypt, which would have been east Africa, but the next verse qualifies 'south' as south of Judah (a name that did not yet exist, of course). More specifically, it meant the very place Abram had departed from, the hill between Bethel and Hai. The word

Genesis 13

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'south' is negeb. Literally, it means parched, but, popularly, it was taken to mean south-country or lower Judah (though it can also refer to an unspecified boundary). However, there is no need to guess, for the text provides the exact location of 'south' (that is, south of Haran).

We can see that Abram left Egypt with very much more than he had when he entered the country. He was "very rich", having cattle, silver, gold. Possibly, this enabled him to have more servants, too. At any rate, he was immensely wealthy, having enjoyed the patronage of the Pharaoh of Egypt.

Note that Abram called on 'the LORD' (interestingly, he did not appear to use the oldest known name for 'God', El), or 'Jehovah' (the self-existing One, a reference to His eternal state, making Him unique). Taken from hayah (exist), this name was, and is not, pronounced by the Hebrews (who did not exist at this time), as a sign of respect and reverence (they referred to YHWH), except for the vowel pointings of Adonay, meaning my lord, or Lord. Thus, instead of referring directly to God as Jehovah, the later Hebrews used a substitute word, Adonay, or adon, which is an emphatic form of adown, meaning to rule, or strong master, king, or the Lord God. It also refers to "thy husband, Yahweh", meaning Lord of lords, and much more.

Really, the word adonay refers to human rulers who have might and authority over servants, etc. Possibly, this device was used to remove the name from deity, in the hope that the speaker could not then be charged with impudently talking directly with Almighty God. Adonay or adon could apply to ordinary men, of rank as well as no rank, 'my lord' (lower case 'L').

Even more interestingly, calling God adonai or adon, is to infer a plural God, for adonai is a plural term meaning 'my Lords' (capital 'L'), as is the case with Elohim. We find this name joined with YHWH (adonai YHWH) in Genesis 15:2 and in Deuteronomy 3:24 and 9:26. In these texts it means 'my Lord'. Only later was it taken to be solely a name of God, as in 'the Lord' or 'the LORD' (though Lord with a capital, or LORD, all capitals, imply 'God').

Historically, the early Hebrews actually pronounced the full word, Yahweh, with its vowels, at least until the destruction of the first temple. It was not until some time after this, that the Hebrews avoided using the vowels and only used the consonants, YHWH. This unpronounceable name was called the Tetragrammaton. Because it could not be pronounced, the name Adonia was used as a substitute. When coupled with Yahweh, it was then again renamed as 'Adonai Elohim' or 'Lord God'. Today, many Jews use the term 'G-d', removing the vowel. For inexplicable reasons, some Christians do the same, when God allows us to use His

Genesis 13

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Thursday, 26 March 2015 16:37

name.

When Gentile Christian scholars began to learn Hebrew they could not fully understand what the double appellation really meant, so they coined an hybrid name, Jehovah. Hebrews *then* became uncomfortable using even the *substitute* word, Adonai, and so resorted to using a 'non-name' that only obliquely referred to God – 'ha-Shem, meaning 'the Name'. All of this is apparently due to a Hebrew misinterpretation of the third commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of YHWH thy God in vain." Its true meaning is "You shall not swear falsely by the name of YHWH your God."

The name 'Yehovah' or Yahweh is a shortened form of a much longer name, such as Yahweh-Asher-Eheyeh ('He brings into existence whatever exists') or Yahweh Zevaot ('He brings the hosts of heaven – or of Israel – into existence'). Whilst all this might seem rather confusing to the ordinary reader, it illustrates a rich tapestry of meanings behind the oft-read terms of scripture, a feast of information for those who delve into God's word with lively spirit!

Verses 5-12

1.

"And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents.

2.

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.

3.

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.

4.

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.

Genesis 13

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5.

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.

6.

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.

7.

Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

8.

Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

9.

But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.”

That Abram had far more than what he went into Egypt with, is found in the statement “the land was not able to bear them’. Abram had his flocks and herds in the area between Bethel and Hai. So did Lot. Between them, the area was overrun with the animals they kept. In effect, there were too many animals per square kilometre of land, so their presence was not that of grazers, but more akin to locusts... between them, they were reducing the land to useless space. Something had to be done.

Arguments soon arose between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot. Each was angered because the other’s animals were grazing where they thought they ought not to be. A ‘range war’ was imminent. Verse 7 ends with a seemingly unrelated statement – that the Canaanite and the Perizzite were living there, too, as the occupiers of the land. Abram and Lot were strangers to

Genesis 13

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Thursday, 26 March 2015 16:37

the indigenous peoples, but, they were soon to divide up the land between themselves, without consulting the original dwellers. In particular, the Perrizites lived in the south of Canaan, in one or more hamlets (collections of villages). So, not only did the flocks of Abram and Lot need more space – the space they took drowned the needs of the local flocks!

Recognising the urgency of the problem, Abram spoke to Lot. 'I urge you: do not let us argue amongst ourselves; or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are close kinsmen.' Abram probably looked out over the hills and plains, opening his arms wide: 'Look, see all of that land before you? Divide off what belongs to you – you go to the left and I will go to the right. Or, if you prefer, you can choose the other side.' This was magnanimous of Abram, for he was the elder, the true ruler of the group. But, he wanted an amicable settlement with his nephew. So, he left it up to Lot to choose his territory.

Lot perused the whole vista before him and looked toward the plain of Jordan. It was fertile with a superb supply of water. The writer then inserts a reference to the fact that Sodom and Gomorrah, which were now there, would later be removed. This verse indicates a land that existed before the destruction of the whole area by God with fire, brimstone and salt. It was fertile and well-watered. Afterward it became arid desert. We also note that the area between Egypt and southern Judah was also, at one time, fertile.

The 'garden of the Lord' may be a reference to the original Eden, though it is not specifically mentioned. The word garden, gan, is the same as that used to describe Eden in earlier texts. If it is a reference to Eden, it does not necessarily prove that Eden was in that vicinity, only that the place was 'as' the garden, or like it. The writer would not have seen the Garden of Eden, for it was obliterated by the Flood. Zoar was one of the five cities in what is now the Dead Sea region, where Sodom and Gomorrah once were. Though the other four cities were later destroyed, Zoar was allowed to remain unscathed as Lot's place of sanctuary.

Lot chose the plain of Jordan. No doubt his presence on foreign soil was tolerated by the kings of the cities, because he was only one man with one family and flocks/herds. At that time, then, neither he nor his uncle, Abram, were rulers, except over their own fortunes, so they were no real threat to the inhabitants. So, Lot travelled east toward the central area and cities, settling his tents close to Sodom, and Abram travelled west, or north-west, into Canaan.

Sadly, we find that Lot unwittingly made an error by living close to Sodom. The men there were 'wicked'. The word 'men' seemingly refers to the males and not to mankind in general. Indeed,

Genesis 13

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Thursday, 26 March 2015 16:37

to interpret it as mankind would be a tortuous use of language. The men were wicked, evil, bad. They were unpleasant, bringing much unhappiness to their womenfolk and the area in general. Their actions and deeds were despicable, and this is proved in later texts.

In modern days these men would be known as pornographers and homosexuals, as the term 'sodomy' suggests. It is a fact that men who relish and pursue such evils tend to be vile in their thoughts, and so all of life is affected by their singular fantasies and activities.

These men were sinners before the Lord, chatta, offenders and condemned, because they missed the goal of pleasing God. They were thus guilty and unclean, chata. They 'missed the mark' and this is the meaning of the word 'sin' in the New Testament, too.

Verses 14-18

1.

"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:

2.

For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

3.

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.

4.

Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

5.

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."

Genesis 13

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God spoke to Abram and told him to look at the land he was in: north, south, west and east. “I will give you and your descendants this land forever”, said God. This means in perpetuity. What of the position today? Do present day Jews own the land that they now occupy? According to this text and similar texts, they still do. But, other texts tell us that continued residence depends on the nation’s obedience to God. This is an instance of a promise-with-conditions. So, modern Israel does belong to the Jewish nation, if they obey.

God told Abram that his descendants would be so numerous as to make it impossible for men to detect the true number. ‘Come’, invited God, ‘walk whichever way you wish, for that is the extent of the land you have been given.’ After this, Abram took down his tents and removed his group to the plain of Mamre (‘strength’ or ‘fatness’) in Hebron with oak groves. There, he built another altar to God as a memorial to His greatness.

We see in this a man who obeyed God and did what appeared to be simply a natural thing to do: to avoid strife, he split up the family, who went different ways. Superficially, this was just a family argument. But, it was actually part of God’s plan, and so Abram acknowledged it with an altar. Often, what seems to be just ordinary moves within a lifetime are really God’s moves.

Similarly, what seems to be attractive in our lives may actually be the shackles of sin. Lot moved to an area he thought was attractive, but it was ruled by evil men with vicious, sensual natures. This move, though seemingly good at the time, actuated a chain of events that led to the complete destruction of the whole region by God.

So, do not be overawed by what seems to be attractive, and do not be dismayed by what seems to be something detrimental to your life – one can be a trap and the other might be God’s exact plan for your life, with greater rewards than you can imagine. Never make decisions about life-changing activities without consulting God! What might seem a ‘good idea’ and attractive to us, might well be the start of events we did not anticipate, to be ruined by sin and damaging our spiritual, and even physical, lives. As I keep saying... God first, everything else last!

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Thursday, 26 March 2015 16:37

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