

BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger... John 6:35

GENESIS 12-14

The story of the tower of Babel concluded an important era. This came to be known as the Era of Desolation, now the Era of Torah begins. Chapter 12 of Genesis marks a major turning point in the LORD's dealings with mankind. He is now calling one man in order to raise up a people for himself that will be characterized by righteousness and justice and who will be able to reveal the one and only true God to mankind. We are now approximately 2000 years from Creation. There were ten generations from Adam to Noah and a further ten generations to Abram.

We cannot overestimate the importance of Abraham as the first patriarch of Israel:

Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD; look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him (Is. 51: 11-2)

Abram's Background

As we saw in the last study, Abraham came from the lineage of Shem, through his father, Terah. Terah had three sons – Abraham, Nahor and Haran. Haran fathered Lot, Milcah and Iscar¹, then he died. Nahor married Milcah (his cousin) and they had eight children, the last being Bethuel, the father of Rebekah. We will see later that it is vitally important for the future wives of the patriarchs to come from this same family.

Terach took Abram, his wife Sarai, and Haran's son Lot, and they left Ur of the Chaldees² to go to the Land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran they stayed there. Terach died in Haran and Abram took Sarai and his nephew Lot and followed the call of the LORD.

This monumental step of faith was picked up in the letter to the Hebrews: *"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going."* (Heb. 11:8)

Abram's Calling – read 12:1-9

Now the LORD had said to Abram: Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you are to be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and those who curse you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed." (12:1-3)

The LORD calls Abram to separate himself from all that is familiar – his homeland, kinsmen and his father's house – and He makes six promises. All that the LORD requires of Abram at this stage is 'to be a blessing'. Abram's personal relationship with God showed itself in separation.

Disciples of Yeshua are also called to separate themselves – **from what?**

See Luke 14:25-27; Mt. 10:37-39; 2 Cor. 6:14-17 – Can you relate this to your own faith journey?

¹ Jewish commentators believe that Iscar is actually Sarah.

² The capital of the Chaldees was Babylon, the centre of idol worship..

Jewish commentators reveal interpretative subtleties in the Hebrew wording of the first verse. For example, it could read: “*Go by yourself*”- This is one journey which must be made alone”; “*Go to yourself*” - go to your roots, to find your potential; “*Go for yourself*” - for your own pleasure and benefit.³

Q. What did Abraham hear?

Q. Can you identify with any or all of these interpretations?

❖ **Hebrew Insight:** In Gen. 12:3 “And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse.” This verse seems very clear, but a very important nuance is lost in translation.

In Hebrew, the verb “to bless” is בָּרַךְ, and has a meaning to “bend the knees”, “to kneel,” and implies rendering service to someone. Therefore, one possible meaning of this verse may be: “I will serve those who serve you!” To serve, implies doing good for someone which will result in a benefit/blessing for the recipient.

God also promises Abraham that “everyone who curses him” מְקַלֵּלְךָ (*mekalelcha*) will be in turn “be cursed” אָרָר (*aor*). The first word for “curses” – מְקַלֵּלְךָ (*mekalelcha*) comes from a root that literally means “to make light of something heavy.” However, the second word for “curse,” אָרָר (*aor*) actually comes from a completely different root that means something like “to utterly destroy.”

Taking these insights from Hebrew into consideration, the translation could be presented as follows: “I will do good to those who do good to you, and the one who makes light of you, I will utterly destroy.”

God is the initiator of ‘blessing’ but Abraham and his seed are the instruments through which the blessing will flow – firstly he must ‘go forth’ to a land God will show him, leaving all behind, and secondly, he will be blessed in order to be a blessing—ultimately to all mankind. So Abram set out for the Land with his wife, Lot, all their possessions and the souls they had acquired at Haran.⁴ BUT the Canaanites were then in the land, and the Canaanites were perverse and immoral.

The land is promised by God, but it needs to be subdued/conquered. Faith is an upward journey – in order to ‘possess the land’ Israel must rise above adversity, immorality, and idolatry, and walk in righteousness – *lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you* (Lev.18:18).

The Land⁵ is the constant destination right from the beginning, and we know that it is a very real, geographical location. Why do you think this land is so vitally important to God and Israel?

There is no reference to the ‘Land’ in the NT. How do we explain this, considering it was so vitally important in the time of the Patriarchs and beyond?

Abraham is described as heir, not of a small strip of land, but the whole world (see Rom. 4:13)! And we read in Psalm 37:11 and Matthew 5:5 *The meek shall inherit the earth*. Is the ‘Promised Land’ still important, when God’s ultimate goal is for the righteous to possess the whole earth? **DISCUSS**

Digging Deeper

In order to gain more from the study of Torah, we also need to see it from another, deeper perspective. To possess the land can also mean to take possession of our own souls, which have been separated from God and contaminated by the world. We need to *take possession* of our

³ *Light of Torah.net*

⁴ From the beginning, Abraham is a man of influence for God.

⁵ There are five references to the Land in verses 5-7

land/our soul. The NT writers seem to have understood this, as can be seen by the following scriptures:

In Luke 21 Jesus speaks to his disciples about persecutions they will face, for His name's sake, even from within their own families, and he ends with these words: v.19 *"By your patience possess your souls."*

Mark 8:36: *For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?*

1 Peter 1:8-9 *Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving **the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.***

God wants us to *'take hold of that for which he took hold of us'*; to defeat the enemy of our souls that seeks to devour us, and keep us from our divinely ordained destiny. This inevitably involves repentance, choices, challenges to overcome, lessons to learn, but also joy and victories. **DISCUSS**

6 Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh And the Canaanites were then in the land. 7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. 8 And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.*

* Heb. *Alon Moreh*.⁶ This becomes a significant place in Abraham's life. See Gen. 13:18; 14:13; 18:1.

Alon = 'great tree', from a root word, *'ayil*, meaning 'ram' (because of its strength). Interestingly the word, *'ayil*, is used for the ram's skins dyed red that cover the tabernacle, and also the ram of the whole burnt offering.

Moreh = 'teacher', from a root word meaning 'former rain'.

Q. Discuss the significance of this place – *Alon Moreh*

Abram in Egypt – read: Genesis 12:10-20

v.13 *Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me for your sake* – Is this simply a lie, a half-truth; what are Abram's motives? Who is he protecting?

The archives show that Egyptians of this period were famous for wife abduction. However, as a 'brother', Abraham is in a position to negotiate for her. Although Abram hid the fact that Sarai was his wife to protect himself, it was Pharaoh who was struck with a plague. This is seen as the outworking of the Covenantal blessing: Pharaoh and his household were cursed for cursing Abram, and Abram was blessed in spite of his wrong actions. This, it is said, shows that the covenant was unconditional. **DISCUSS**

Abram stepped out in faith, but there is a journey ahead of him, just as our own first step of faith is only the beginning of a long journey – there is much to learn and many ups and downs along the way. God is patient, and the road can be quite unpredictable. Understandably, Abram has not yet learned to rely totally on the promises of God. In going DOWN into Egypt, he discovers his weakness and vulnerability. He will be humbled; he will learn some vital lessons, particularly, that he survives not by human strategy, but by divine covenantal protection. It is God who intervenes to save the situation and not Abram.

Notice that God does not berate him – in fact Abram came out of Egypt "very laden with livestock, silver and gold." **Q. How do you understand this?**

Digging Deeper

Sister or wife?⁷ – Here are some crumbs that you might like to chew on:

- *You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; (Song of Solomon 4:9)*
- Where else do you see a ‘sister’ becoming a bride?⁸
- In Eph. 5 Paul speaks of marriage being a ‘deep mystery’, which refers to Christ and the church.
- *A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

A fundamental principle in understanding Torah’s narrative concerning the Patriarchs is that whatever happens to them is a portent for their children, i.e. events in their lives symbolized the future. For example, we see many parallels in this story of Abraham with the exile of Israel in Egypt – e.g. they both came out of Egypt with great possessions, including silver and gold, and both Pharaohs were struck with plagues. (Ex. 12:35)

Abraham had gained (spiritual) riches and was now able to ascend back to the place where he had pitched his tent in the beginning, between Bethel and Ai (12:8, 13:3) — *Ai* means “Heap of ruins”, and *Beth-el* means “House of God”, which seems to speak of his spiritual state at this stage—and there he again called upon the name of the LORD, richer for the downward journey.

Abram and Lot separate

Chapter 13:5-18 explains the dissension which arose between Abram and Lot’s herdsmen. Abram did not want quarrelling between himself and Lot, since they were kinsmen, so he said, “Please separate yourself from me.” Abram gave Lot the choice of the land and Lot (v.10) *lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the Plains of Jericho ... that it was well watered everywhere... like the garden of the LORD...* Lot saw what he wanted with his own eyes and he aggressively moved to take possession of what he wanted – what his flesh desired. He chose to ‘pitch his tent’ in the city of Sodom, where the men were ‘exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD.’ Interestingly, the name ‘Lot’ means veil or covering. Lot still had a veil over his eyes. Unlike Abraham, Lot had not responded to God’s call – he merely ‘went with him’. (v.5)

“Lot can also be said to symbolize the part of man that is still in darkness, in other words, the natural or animal instinct. This part of man’s nature he cannot escape, but must take with him into the new country. He can, however, by association, lift it up and increase its capacity, as Abraham “lifted up” and aided Lot, for we read that Lot prospered as well.”⁹

After Lot was separated from him, the LORD said to Abram:

“Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever.¹⁰ I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I give it to you.”

God expands on His promise regarding Abram’s seed (13:16, 12:7) saying *I will make your seed like the dust of the earth...* This is the second confirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant.

When we see this phrase “(na - I pray you) *Lift up your eyes and see*” it reveals a prophetic vision - something beyond the present circumstance. Everything Abram saw was now given him by divine grant, including the very area Lot took for himself. He was told to walk the length and breadth of it, and as he walked, prophetically speaking, he was taking possession of it. (see Deut. 11:24, Josh. 1:3)

⁷ The sister/wife issue comes up on two more occasions, so it is not insignificant.

⁸ Mark 3:35; Mt. 12:50; Heb. 2:11; Rev. 19:7

⁹ Charles Fillimore, *Mysteries of Genesis – the Key to the Bible*. p76.

¹⁰ “*Ad olam*, lit. ‘until an age’ because it is during the Messianic Age that Abram and his seed will fully occupy and enjoy the Promised Land.” (Fruchtenbaum)

There seems no doubt that this is a physical inheritance for Abram and his seed, but on another level, it is also a spiritual inheritance.

Why must he walk the length and breadth of it – and how does that relate to our walk with God?
“In him we have obtained an inheritance...” (Eph 1:11), which we must also take possession of by faith.

Abram rescues Lot – read 14:17-20

In chapter 13 Abram is a man of peace; in chapter 14 he is a man of war. Both actions are Abram’s response to his responsibility toward his nephew Lot. Unlike Cain, he accepts the moral responsibility of being his ‘brother’s keeper.’

Lot gets caught up in the “Battle of the Kings” and is captured, with all of his possessions. Abram was alerted, called his trained men and they set off in pursuit. Abram wins the battle and brings back all the captives and their possessions. Who then meets him, in this victorious moment?

Two kings approach him: Bera, king of Sodom, greets him in verse 17, and then Melchizedek, King of Shalem, brings out bread and wine and blesses him in verses 18-20. The meeting takes place at the Valley of Shaveh, which is the “King’s Valley” and here Abram is faced with choosing between two kings: Melchizedek, the King of Salem (Peace), who represents righteousness, and Bera¹¹, the King of Sodom, known for its wickedness and depravity. The two kings are seen to approach Abram simultaneously. While Melchizedek blesses Abram and God Most High, ensuring that Abram knows that God “has delivered your foes into your hand”, the King of Sodom, offers him a subtle temptation: ‘Give me the people and you keep the spoil.’

Melchizedek turns Abram toward God, the King of Sodom tries to turn him from God, to himself.

But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have lifted my hand¹² to the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’ (14:21-23)

Abraham was entitled to keep all the spoils of war by right of conquest, but he chose not to. Neither was he obligated to return the people of Sodom he had captured. He could have made them his slaves. However, to show devotion to God he rejected any personal gain from his victory, only giving his own men their due portion, thereby being a blessing to them.

This is a lesson for all of us – we cannot serve two masters.

Q. Can you recall instances in your own faith journey that could relate to this test?

Melchizedek

In rabbinic tradition, Melchizedek¹³ was the same person as Shem, son of Noah. Here he approaches the victorious Abram as: King of Salem; priest of *El Elyon* – Most High God; He blessed Abram on God’s behalf– showing his exalted position; He brought out bread and wine; and Abram gave him a tithe (tenth) of everything. Melchizedek is vitally important as a ‘type’ of Christ. He is disclosed in only three books of the bible: here in Genesis; Psalm 110:4; and Hebrews 5:6,10; 6:20, 7:1-17.

READ AND DISCUSS

¹¹ Bera can mean “from evil”.

¹² Sworn an oath.

¹³ Melchizedek, meaning ‘righteous King’, is probably a title, not a name.