

GENESIS

Lesson 12 - Chapters 12 and 13

READ Gen 12: 4- end

We begin by **now** understanding that a God-created covenant is nothing less than a new or modified law of nature. There is no other word we can come up with that expresses the unfathomable force of a covenant. A promise, a contract, a doctrine, a will and testament are all but weak and inferior man-centered devices, as flawed and apt to break down as the humans who made them. A covenant of God has as its source the very Spirit of God; therefore, of anything man is aware, nothing can be as certain as that the purpose of that covenant will be carried out.

Abraham is the first of a series of men called "The Patriarchs". Sometimes Noah is called a Patriarch, but just as the Judges and the Kings and the Prophets of the Bible were not the **only** people who ever judged or ruled or prophesied, Noah does not fall into the technical biblical classification of "Patriarch". Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.....father, son, and grandson.....were the 3 men that have at all times been the ones referred to as Patriarchs.

If we were to read only the OT, we would not be sure exactly where it was that Abraham received his marching orders directly from God Most High. The Genesis accounts of chapters 11 and 12 seem to make it that while temporarily settled in at Haran of Mesopotamia, Abraham, currently called Avram, got his call. But, Acts 7 tells us that BEFORE he got to Haran.....presumably on the family's trek from Ur of the Chaldees...God appeared to Avram. Some Jewish Sages say, no, it was actually **AT** Ur where Avram was summoned. I find that very unlikely; for as long as Terach, Abraham's father, was still living, he would have called the shots when it came to moving the family, it would not have been at the order of his son. At the least we know that it was either during or immediately before Terach, Nahor, and Abraham lived in Haran, that God boldly approached Avram with a deal he couldn't refuse.

What is clear is that Abraham's family was just as pagan as the rest of the world at this time. It is unimaginable that prior to God's calling upon him that Abraham divorced himself from multiple god worship; otherwise he would have been at odds with his entire family at every step; and I am confident the we would have found words in the Torah similar to those pronounced upon Noah.....that he was different from all other men. In other words, Noah was judged to be the most righteous of all men on earth; we get no such reassurance as regards Avram.

Further, implicit in the command of God for Avram to leave his country, and leave his father, and leave his family, is that **separation** was demanded. What Abraham was going to have to

do could not be accomplished by remaining among a people...including his own family.... thoroughly dedicated to their perverted religion.

This constant pattern of God dividing, electing, and separating continues, therefore, by the creation of the first man of a new nation of people; a people who would be set apart just for God. I cannot imagine that Abraham took this instruction to leave behind everything he knew in exchange for but some **words** of promise.....even if the words WERE from a recently introduced God.....without much doubt and trepidation. It is equally as unthinkable that he simply accepted all that God said, and carried it all out, in absolute purity. One can be divided and elected as was Abraham, but that hardly means that all ingrained thoughts of the previous 75 years of life.....all the traditional and unquestioned ways of behavior and of worshipping gods he had learned....simply fled him. If it were that easy and matter-of-fact, the forced separation of Abraham and those who would go with him, from the old, would not have been needed.

It is man's habit that we hate to let go of familiar things.....even if those familiar things are weighing us down, or even destroying us. The security of the familiar present, no matter how terrible or hollow, is somehow better in our minds than the discomfort of facing an unknown future of change. And, left to our own devices, we often try to move forward into renewal, while staying latched like an abalone to a rock, on all that needs to be left behind. The pattern God shows us is not simply about division; nor only about election; nor even about division then election. That 3rd and final indispensable part of this dynamic process of remolding all until His purposes are achieved must occur in concert with the first 2; and that 3rd part is separation. Separation in one way or another is a prerequisite to serving God.

Does that separation even involve family? You bet it does, and interestingly that is precisely the example given here. I'm certainly not talking about divorce, but it could happen that way. Not as God's will per se, but divorce as the result of a bad decision on someone's part; and the resulting separation now being used by God to achieve good in ways we could never have contemplated. It could be the death of a spouse, or a parent that causes the separation. And, it could be, as with Abraham, that for the purpose God has ordained for you, you cannot stay tied to the old.....as painful as that separation might be.

But, the separation could also be from friends who simply do not share the values you know you must follow; or others who find you odd due to the wholeheartedness that you now have in following and serving Yahweh. Perhaps the separation must be from a church or a synagogue that has, over time, lost it's first love, and now blindly chases after the world.....nothing unusual, by the way, nor anything that should be all that unexpected given what we're told in Revelation.

This concept of separation is of course central to Christ's teachings, although it is not usually recognized as such.....it just seems as though these are but several of Our Savior's statements that cause us much trouble. And, here is the classic:

NAS Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple."

This is all about separation, not hatred in the sense that we typically think of it. This is about being prepared to be at odds with those closest to you.....as was Abraham with his family.....once you are called by God. Recognizing that you can no longer remain tied to the past, particularly a wicked past; that God's calling surpasses any other purpose for your existence. Let's listen to more of what Jesus would say on this subject:

NAS Matthew 10:34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; 36 and a man's enemies will be the members of his household."

In Bible-speak, many of the members of Abraham's household became his enemies, because he was called by Yahweh to abandon everything they held dear, and to become God's man for a special assignment. Christ came to divide and separate as perhaps no other before Him. The sword spoken of by Yeshua is not so much a symbol of killing, as a symbol of dividing. And, He recognizes that for some, the circumstances of their being set-apart for Him are going to be heartbreaking. Therefore, He continues by saying:

NAS Matthew 19:29 "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life."

Separation.....which is often expressed in the Bible using words like set-apart, or sanctified, or distinction.....MUST occur in one form or another if one is to be a Believer. This is because **the** primary change in nature for a human, as a result of Salvation, is that he/she becomes holy. And, by definition, holy means to be set-apart.

So, by means of accepting the separation God insisted upon, in V4, Abraham ratified the covenant God made with him. In other words, simply by going, by leaving Haran and his family and his nation and going to Canaan, Abraham fulfilled his part of the deal..... the entire remainder of the terms of the covenant...terms, which would take centuries to develop and come about.....were on God. It was utterly impossible for Abraham to fail and break the covenant, because it wasn't up to Abraham. This is perhaps the best definition of what a permanent covenant is: it's all on God. It's unilateral. A quick biblical rule about covenants: if man or nature has to continue upholding some part of the covenant in order for it to remain valid, then it's a **conditional** covenant, which means it CAN be broken, and therefore a consequence will come about.

Verses 4 and 5 tell us that Abraham, Sarai (his wife), and Lot (his nephew, who was the son of Abraham's deceased brother, Haran), along with a bunch of cousins and servants, headed south in the direction of the Land of Canaan. Remember, Canaan was the son of Ham; Canaan was the grandson who had a curse placed on him by his angry grandfather, Noah. So, where Abraham was headed, was the area that Canaan and his tribe had migrated to many years earlier. We are now at a time period of around 1975 –2000 BC. By the Biblical record, we're perhaps 350 years since the Great Flood, and scores of millions of people inhabited the earth.

We are told that the land God showed Abraham was populated with Canaanites..... those descendants of Ham and his son Canaan..... and that God led Abraham and his clan quite a distance through the land before they came to a specific spot: Shechem. BTW: today, Shechem is known as Nablus, one of the cities under Palestinian control in the West Bank area of dispute. And, there, God actually appeared to Abraham in some unspecified visible form. God appearing to a man, from a Biblical perspective, was rare indeed. But, it was to make a very clear point that we must take at face value to this day: there, God told Abraham that THIS was the land He was giving to him and to all his descendants. Appropriately, Abraham built an altar and sacrificed to Yahweh.

Apparently, either through God's choice or a preference left up to Abraham, the clan moved on, further south. They journeyed about 25 miles, likely only 3 or 4 days at most, and stopped for a time between what eventually came to be called Bethel and Ai. Bethel and Ai were only a couple of miles apart. There, Abraham built another altar and sacrificed to Yahweh. Some undefined period later, he took and his family and journeyed even further south, into the desert regions. By the way, Negev is Hebrew for "south".

We should understand that without doubt, Abraham's travels had nothing to do with his being someone with the urge of wanderlust; moving was always dangerous and difficult. Rather, the first Patriarch's movements had more to do with the never-ending search of an owner of herds and flocks for new water and pasture sources.

We don't know what period of time transpired from Abraham's entering the Land of Canaan, to his going to the southern end, but during that time conditions apparently worsened until there was a full-blown famine that threatened his family's survival. In a decision he would soon regret, Abraham went to Egypt to seek relief from the famine and ran headlong into Pharaoh, who took a fancy to Abraham's wife, Sarai. There is no mention of Yahweh directing Abraham to leave, and go to Egypt; it was Abraham's concern to survive that drove him to Egypt.....a pattern which would be repeated by his grandson, Jacob, a couple of hundred years later. Yet, Abraham hardly invented the idea of going to the nation that had been known for many years by then as the granary for the region, and therefore had become a rather standard place of refuge particularly for the Bedouin desert wanderers of that era. Egypt was for those who lived at the southern end of the Middle East land mass, what Mesopotamia was for those who lived to the north; a region of fabulous and dependable fertility.

Now, one thing we need to take from these previous passages is how readily and ably people traveled in 2000 BC. There were many well-traveled routes, easy to follow, marked water wells, and though it was not an every day occurrence, strangers showing up in foreign places were not all an uncommon event. People of that era were well aware of other peoples and far-flung nations, and news traveled steadily by means of the trade-routes that criss-crossed the Middle East, and went as far as India and China by Abraham's day.

Now, Abraham, having made the decision to take his clan to Egypt until the hard times passed up in Canaan, prepared a deception for what he intuitively feared might happen; and he told Sarai to say she was his sister, and not his wife. Truth be told, she was actually both his wife and his sister..... his half-sister, daughter of another of his own father's wives.

Sarai, new to Egypt, was immediately spotted by Pharaoh's men, and it was reported to him that she was an exceptional beauty. And, so, in Hollywood films about Abraham we'll see a lovely young woman being carted off to be part of Pharaoh's harem. Considering that it was likely around 10 years since Abraham left Mesopotamia, he would have been about 85 at the time they entered Egypt. But, Sarai was only 10 years younger; making her about 75 years old.

Abraham prospers greatly from this deception; he wound up with a great number of animals AND servants. All this would have been a customary gift.....a bride's price.....paid by Pharaoh to Abraham for the hand of "his sister".

In any case, Pharaoh somehow finds out Sarai is actually Abraham's wife, and probably due to some type of pagan practice, becomes fearful that taking another man's wife will cause some type of supernatural disaster. He's right to be concerned; God suddenly strikes Pharaoh and his household with plagues.....NOT ALL of Egypt, just Pharaoh's personal household.... So, Pharaoh returns Sarai to Abraham, and orders Abraham and his family to leave Egypt..... with all their possessions and their people intact. One thing we should not overlook: beginning right here, there is a relationship of sorts created that will bring God's line of promise into contact and conflict with Egypt for centuries to come. It's also kind of interesting that this particular Pharaoh of Egypt was wise enough to know better than to mess too much with Abraham; because several hundred years later, another Pharaoh displayed a less than wise attitude towards God's people, and neither he nor Egypt was ever the same from that moment forward.

READ Gen 13 all

So, Abraham and his clan leaves Egypt, and goes back up to Canaan, and we're told in V2 "NOW Abram was very rich....". That is, he actually profited quite a bit from his trip to Egypt. I can just picture Pharaoh loading Abraham up with all the gold, silver, precious jewels, livestock, anything he wants..... just PLEASE get the heck out of here, and take your god with you!

By now, many of you are thinking, hey, this sounds an awful lot like Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt. Yes. This is another of those biblical types; this event sets up the pattern for that event that was to come several centuries later: the coming to Egypt of Jacob, and the subsequent exodus from Egypt of Jacob's people, now called Israelites.

As any owner of herds and flocks would do, Abraham took his family and his livestock back to the areas he had already discovered were good for water and pasture; he went back to the area of Bethel and Ai.

The newfound wealth that Abraham received from his adventure in Egypt soon presented some unanticipated problems: between Lot, his nephew, and Abraham, they had so much livestock there was no longer sufficient pasture lands nor water to sustain them, so fights broke out among the herdsmen.

Abraham makes a decision: they must separate. And, in a generous and Godly act, Abraham tells Lot that he may choose the land he wants for himself, and Abraham will take what is left. So, Lot takes his wealth and goes to the rich lands of the Jordan Valley, and settles near Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham in the fields of Canaan, Lot in the cities of the valley; another division and separation is occurring. Abraham is being further separated from unrighteousness that is in the soul of Lot. Sodom was a notoriously wicked place and Lot well knew that; that's WHY he chose it and undoubtedly why he was drawn to it. And, I have little doubt that the elderly and much wiser Abraham knew EXACTLY what Lot would choose.

After Abraham separates himself from Lot, Yahweh speaks to Abraham as if to reinforce the godliness and wisdom of that decision. God now adds some details to the terms of the covenant He's already made with Abraham, by telling him in V15 that all the land he sees, in every direction, will be his and his descendants'; and it will be their land **ad 'olam**; ad 'olam is the common Hebrew term meaning FOREVER.... perpetual, never-ending; those aren't my words, they're God's.

So, a new law of the universe had just been decreed AS REGARDS THE LAND and AS REGARDS THE NUMBER OF HIS DESCENDANTS in the form of a permanent..... NOT a conditional..... covenant. God didn't say, "If you'll do this, I'll do that". There would be no amount of sin or rebellion that Abraham or his descendants could commit to cause God to rescind that covenant, and over and over again the Prophets remind us of that in scripture. Yet, for the last several hundred years, much of the Church has said that that covenant no longer exists, and that God has instead disposed of his promise to Abraham and essentially turned it over to gentile Christians, as the New Israel. Nonsense. Most certainly Yahweh warned that the people would be removed from that land.....for a time.....because of their lusting after other gods. But, NEVER was it ever going to be permanently taken from them by Yahweh, and THAT is made abundantly clear in the Bible.

Of all the scriptures I have read concerning the return of Israel....ALL Israel....to their land, the one that strikes my heart the deepest is Ezekiel 36 and 37. And, we will take that up in the next lesson.