

**THE PATRIARCHS
ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB**



STUDY 1 - ABRAHAM WEEK 3

The Promise... Lived

We left Abram as he and his extended family were setting off along the road towards Canaan. All they had known before was to be left behind, and they did not know at the start of the journey where or when it would end. However, they did get to Canaan and for a while they lived a nomadic life there, pitching and re-pitching their tents and living as strangers in a land already settled by other tribes and families.

Read Genesis 12; 10 - 20

This is the first of three 'Sister/Wife' stories we find in the book of Genesis, (the other two are in chapter 20 (Abraham again) and 26, (Isaac)). This one seems very obviously to be a sort of 'pre-echo' or foreshadowing of the story of ?.....? ?

What similarities can you find between this story and what happened in the story about that other famine two generations later?

The writer seems to be quite deliberately preparing the Reader in advance for the big story we find in the second book of the Bible. Ideas and motifs are being introduced and will be repeated that will give a continuity to the bigger picture that underpins the idea that there is a 'Plan' behind all this.

It is never an easy thing to do to put your life in the hands of another. Abram received a whole series of promises from God about his future prosperity, about him and his family being a blessing to others; about the future of his family in the following generations; about the emergence of a Great Nation and about a land which would become theirs. Now Abram has to begin to live the life that God has set before him, without Abram having any proper understanding of how any of this was to happen.

'And there was famine in the land...' ()*

This first part of the story does not seem at first glance to bode well for the future. In fact, on the face of it, you might think that God had forgotten the plan and Abraham seems to get it all wrong! There is some sort of problem with the Land which God has shown him! And now it seems that Abram must leave this land of promise! And so he goes, along with his entire retinue, and his nephew, Lot and all he has as well, to Egypt.

What is there in Egypt that might mean it is a good place to go when there is a famine in the land?

'I know that you are a beautiful woman, and so when the Egyptians see you... say you are my sister...'

Up to this point in the story Abram has been silent! We have heard God speak to him, but not a word from Abram. What does Abram appear ask Sarai to do, and does himself this first time he speaks

?.....?



‘And it went well with Abram,.... And the Lord afflicted Pharaoh...’ ()*

Who comes out of this story best and why?

What do you think of the outcome of the story? Does it sound fair?

‘Now, here is your wife.Take her and get out!’ ()*

In the original text Pharaoh says *‘Take and get out!’* and seems to me to underline the exasperation of the Ruler with this man who had come to his country unbidden and had brought nothing but trouble - and no blessings.

Living a life of promise is not easy for Abram, or for us! Let us see whether Abram learns from this experience...

Read Genesis 13; 1 - 4

On his return to Canaan what has changed ? - - ?

Actually, one thing had changed significantly - the amount of goods they now had to carry around with them.

‘And Abram was heavily laden with cattle, with silver and gold’ ()*

You can almost feel the burden this new wealth brought with it in the language. Progress had been slow before but now it seems almost painfully so. The can only travel in short, wearisome stages, all the way back to where they started. But when they get there they find something left behind... Abram’s second Altar.

This returning to a place of origin is a picture used in stories sometimes to denote a new, fresh start. Is the trip to Egypt simply part of a learning process that went wrong, or has Abram’s understanding of his God developed?

Genesis 4; 26 - *‘As for Seth, to him, too, a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. It was then that the name of the LORD was invoked’ (*)*

Moses, it appears, was not the first to know or use the 'name of the LORD' "YHWH" Having a name to call upon is in some way important. It denotes a 'Knowing' - a familiarity with a specific, known person. By this means the God on whom Seth's people called is identified as the same God of Abram, and Abram too is recorded as 'Invoking' that same name. Whilst God no longer comes to Earth to 'Walk in the cool of the evening' this God may be called upon, and in Abram's case at least, will respond to that call.

In chapter 13; 5-12 we read of the parting of Abram's and Lot's family groups as a result of friction over land use - and we are reminded of the presence of the original peoples of the land - Canaanites and Perizzites - and so of Abram's tentative position in that land. The strife between Abram and Lot ran the danger of invoking the wrath of those who lived there already and that might have a very detrimental impact on the nomadic Hebrews.

Abram had to learn how to live a Life of Promise whilst surrounded by a world whose outlook on life was very different. He also has to learn how to possess a promise that seems to be perpetually deferred in its fulfilment.

Does this ring any bells with our own experiences of life and faith?

Abram's answer to the immediate problem with Lot is interesting. Abram is the Patriarch of both families, yet he defers to his Nephew...?and to God?

'Pray, let there be no contention between you and me,... for we are kinsmen. Kindly part with me. If you take the left hand, then I shall go right...' ()*

What other options did Abram have at this point in his life?

Read Genesis 13; 14 - 18...

A promise renewed... and in the language of the 'Pluperfect tense' -

'And the LORD had said to Abram after Lot had parted from him...' ()*

This promise renewed in the present is anchored in the past, where it had been given and declared, but now Abram is entering a new phase, where its fulfilment is emphasised by repetition and expansion - *'And I will make your seed like the dust of the Earth - could a man count the dust...?, so too your seed might be counted!'* (*)...

'And Abram took up his tent and came and dwelt by the Terebinths of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and he built an altar there to the LORD' (*)

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