

Genesis 13

In the previous article, read about Abram and Sarai escaping Egypt, and the clutches of Pharaoh, through God's intervention. This chapter picks up the story as Abram, Sarai and their nephew Lot, journey northward from Egypt. The storyteller makes it clear that God's blessing had not only been given to Abram and Sarai, but to Lot as well. This blessing came in the form of gold, silver and livestock. They have so much livestock between them in fact, that, as they used to say in old Western movies, the land wasn't big enough for the both of them. This reality raises a series of questions. Who will get what land? Who will get the better land? Will they fight over the land? Who will win? These are the natural questions that always arise when land is contested for (which will become a central part of the Biblical story). The outcome of this dilemma might surprise us.

The tradition of the Middle East is that the eldest always gets the best. This tradition would have us assume then that Abram, as the eldest, would select the land which best pleased him, and Lot would take what was left. This, however, is not how the story unfolds. In this tale, Abram says to Lot, *"Look at all of the land. If you take the land on the right, I will take the land on the left. If you take the land on the left I will take the land on the right."* Abram is giving Lot the chance to pick the best portion, which is what Lot appears to do. The writer tells us that Lot looks toward and chooses the Jordan plain, which is well watered and very much like the Garden of Eden. This choice appears to leave Abram with the left-overs which would seem to put the promised blessing of God for Abram in jeopardy, because Lot has taken what ought to have gone to Abram.

One of the great themes of the Genesis stories however, is that what often appears to be the best, most logical, course of action may not, in the end, be the best. The stories constantly remind us that God knows more than humans know and thus we ought always to be open to the surprising ways of God. We can see this as the story continues. Lot, we learn, has chosen the area around Sodom and Gomorrah; which as it turns out is a wicked place (which does not bode well considering how God had dealt with evil in the past). Abram, on the other hand, trusts that God will fulfill God's promised blessing, regardless of which portion of land Abram ends up with. In response to this trust, God renews the covenant by promising Abraham all the land he can see and more children than can possibly be counted. Abram's response to this renewed covenant is to settle by the oaks of Mamre (Hebron) and there build God an altar, in order that God might be thanked and worshipped.

Reflection: On the surface, this chapter appears to be no more than a short travelogue of a portion of Abram and Sarai's journey. Yet, as noted above, it is actually a deft piece of narrative theology (a story telling us something about God and ourselves). First, we learn that sometimes what seems to be the best, is not necessarily the best. This is so because we are not God, meaning we are not capable of seeing everything there is to be seen as we make decisions. Second, God is fully capable of taking whatever decisions we make, and using them for God's purposes (much more about this later in Genesis). Third, God's desire to bless us will always win out, even if it does not appear to do so in the moment.

Questions:

1. When has an un-choice worked out for you? Where did you see God in the outcome?
2. How have you trusted God to care for you in a tough time?
3. How have you been blessed by God?