

THE FIRST BOOK OF MOSES CALLED GENESIS.

GENESIS, CHAPTER 13.

VERSES TAKEN FROM "THE TANAKH. THE JEWISH BIBLE." TRADITIONAL HEBREW TEXT.

13:1...From Egypt, Abram went up to Negeb, with his wife and all that he possessed, together with Lot.

13:2...Now Abram was very rich in cattle, silver and gold.

13:3...And he proceeded by stages from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been formerly, between Bethel and Ai,

13:4...the sight of the altar that he had built there at first; and there Abram invoked the Lord by name.

13:5...Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents,

13:6...so that the land could not support them staying together; for their possessions were so great that they could not remain together.

Sheep and cattle require extensive grazing area, so those who had great blessings could not live close to one another.

13:7...And there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and those of Lot's cattle. The Canaanites and the Perizzites were then dwelling in the land.

ABRAM WAS A MAN OF PEACE, NOT A PACIFIST.

13:8...Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, between my herdsmen and yours, for we are kinsmen.

Abram was a man of peace who, as shown here, went to great lengths to avoid unnecessary conflict. Abram displays great nobility of character. Although the older man, the uncle, and apparently the former guardian, he does not insist on seniority or priority of rights. Peace-loving and generous toward a less powerful

person, he selflessly offers his nephew first choice of grazing land and watering places.

However, it should be noted that loving peace and pursuing peace—two biblical ideas—have little in common with pacifism. Indeed, in the very next chapter, Abram goes to war to save his nephew. Pacifism, the belief that killing is never moral, decreases peace in the world—for the obvious reason that often the only way to stop the murder of innocent people is to kill the murderer(s). Peace is beautiful—but not at the expense of justice or goodness. In formulating a plan of action, the paramount question individuals and governments must ask is not “Will it lead to peace?” But, “Will it lead to good or evil?” If one does not resist evil, temporary “peace” is easily obtained. But such peace is mere delusion; all it does is ensure more violence.

13:9...Is not the whole land before you? Let us separate: if you go north, I will go south; and if you go south, I will go north.”

Abram, eager both to steer clear of strife—and very possibly, to separate from Lot—gave his nephew his choice of land—no questions asked.

In addition to acting generously and maturely, there may have been another reason. Abram did not regret the need to separate from his nephew. Several chapters later, it becomes apparent that although Lot was morally superior to the awful citizens of Sodom, he had a far from impressive character. (See Genesis 19:8 and 30-38)

13:10...Lot looked about him and saw how well watered was the whole plain of the Jordan, all of it—this was before the Lord had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah—

By the time the Israelite reader would have encountered this story, Sodom and Gomorrah would already have been destroyed and therefore appeared desolate. This statement is therefore inserted here to explain that the destruction of these cities had not yet taken place.

13:10 (cont.)...all the way to Zoar, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt.

13:11...So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they parted from each other;

13:12...Abram remained in the land of Canaan while Lot settled in the cities of the Plain, pitching his tents near Sodom.

Ironically, although Abram allowed Lot to choose the land he wanted, Abram, as we shall see in chapter 19, wound up with the better of the deal.

13:13...Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners, against the Lord.

According to archeological evidence, Sodom and Gomorrah were once fertile and well-watered—another argument for the antiquity and accuracy of the Torah since writers living later would not have known about Sodom and Gomorrah’s earlier fertility.

Lot chose this land because he believed it would make him wealthy, ignoring the fact—or, at the very least, not interested in learning—that its inhabitants were deeply immoral. He was like a man who had the choice in the 1930’s to live anywhere he wanted in Europe and chose Berlin because he heard the Nazis were offering investors lucrative business opportunities. Abram, who had different values, let his nephew have wealthy Sodom.

How many people have made moral compromises in the hope they would financially prosper?

13:14...And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had parted from him,

Early Rabbi’s commented that the whole time the “wicked one”—as they would refer to Lot—was with Abram, God barely spoke to Abram. (Just a few words in Genesis 12:7) But now, “after Lot parted,” God speaks to Abram more often and at greater length.

13:14 (Cont.)...”Raise your eyes and look out from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west,

GOD GIVES THE LAND OF ISRAEL TO THE JEWS FOREVER

13:15...for I give all the land that you see to you and your offspring forever.

The land is given by God to Israel unconditionally. And they will possess the rights to that land forever. Even though Israel will go into exile, it is destined to return. Henceforth, there exists an inseparable bond between Israel and the land, a bond powerful enough to defy thousands of years of exile.

There is nothing similar or comparable in the world to the Jews attachment to Israel. Nor is there comparable in the world to the Jews return to Israel after almost two thousand years of exile. For many Christians as well as Jews, it is the most obvious and dramatic example of a divine promise fulfilled. It could be likewise for Muslims, given that the Jews' attachment to the land of Israel is affirmed in the Koran: (5:21) "O my people, enter the Holy Land which God has prescribed for you." (This statement is clearly directed to the Jews.) But, for reasons beyond the scope of this commentary, at the present time, few Muslims regard the return of the Jews to their land as positive, let alone a manifestation of divine promise.

Even those who have no belief in God, let alone in an alleged promise God made three thousand years ago, must acknowledge the historical fact that the Jewish people—and only the Jewish people—have been attached to the Land of Israel for three thousand years. They must also acknowledge that the only sovereign states to have ever existed on that land have been Jewish: the first Jewish state, 1010 (The reign of King David) to 586 BCE; the second Jewish state, 530 BCE to 70 CE; (AD) and the third Jewish state, 1948 to the present. No other sovereign state ever existed in the land of Israel.

Putting aside contemporary Middle East politics, how could anyone, even an atheist, not marvel at the return of the Jews to their homeland after two thousand years? (In addition, Hebrew is the only "dead" language to have ever been revived.)

As there is nothing comparable in all of human history, how is it to be explained?

***THE TORAH IS EARTH-BOUND (AS WELL AS HEAVEN
BOUND)***

Both Biblical and later Judaism are deeply grounded in the material world. God gave the Torah to material beings living in a material world. One major example is the Land of Israel.

From ancient times, Jews have described Judaism as consisting of three components: God, Torah, and Israel. (“Israel” refers both to the Jewish people and to the Land of Israel.) Many of the Torah’s commandments are therefore preoccupied with ways of sanctifying the physical world, whether it be the land. (Such as letting the land lie fallow every seventh year—Leviticus 25:1-7.) or the body. (Such as the laws regarding sex, eating, cleanliness, and purity.)

Many religious people of every faith deem the material world corrupted and therefore identify separating from it with true spirituality and religiosity. Not the Torah. God made the material world and “saw that it was good.” Of course, God is non material. But God placed us in a material world where we are to lead good and holy lives.

13:16...I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, then your offspring too can be counted.

God promised Abram that he would have many descendants, yet his wife was barren. He will later challenge God about his and Sarai’s childlessness. (Genesis 15:2-3) At this point, he was probably torn between bafflement and excitement by God’s promise.

13:17...(Get) up, walk about the land, through its length and its breadth, for I give it to you.”

13:18...And Abram moved his tent, and came to dwell at the terebinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron; and he built an altar there to the Lord.

Just as Abram had to leave his pagan environment to connect with God, modern men and women need to leave their secular environment, at least for a brief time, to have a chance to connect with God. We are all profoundly affected by our environment. If we live in a fully secular place—most Western cities and universities, for example—it is difficult to become God-centered. At the same time, the religiosity of people who have lived only in a religious world can easily

become more of an unthinking habit than a thought-through conviction. Neither a secular ghetto nor a religious ghetto fosters personal or intellectual growth.