

13: Genesis 12

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Genesis 12

- So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him
 - “As the Lord had spoken to him” – we will see this a lot with Abraham. Everything God told Abraham, he did it.
- And Lot went with him
 - Lot represents a sort of half-way point between Abraham who was a man of faith, and the rest of Abraham’s family (i.e. the ones that didn’t even come)
 - Lot shows us that by Abraham’s faith, Lot receives blessing and Lot is influenced. So Lot had some of the faith of Abraham – but we will see that Lot stops halfway and separates from Abraham. Because he only had a part of the faith of Abraham – not as much as Abraham.
 - Lot did not hear God’s voice like Abraham, but Abraham would tell him “God said xyz” and Lot would say “ok let’s do it!” – but he himself, did not really hear God
 - He was righteous by acquaintance, but not righteous in the true sense
- And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan.
 - Haran was the place they stopped on the way to Canaan
 - Abram’s father (Terah) was the one who said they should stop there – but that was not what God wanted. And they were stuck there for almost 15 years until Abram’s father died. But God gave him the calling again.
 - This is why in the Gospel we read “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:26)
 - It does not mean an actual hatred of family members, but rather to love God more than men. If God says something and someone says something else – we do what God wants
 - If you compare Ur with Canaan, it’s as if someone left a rich populous country and went to a poor land in the desert in the middle of nowhere. Hearing God say “go to Canaan” he might think that God is taking him to a place better than where he is... and then he reaches Canaan and sees what it is, what would he think? He might think “doesn’t God want what’s best for me? Doesn’t he want me to live in higher standards?” God wants us to live in higher standards in our spiritual life. Many people think that once they increase in their relationship with God, they will get

everything they want in the world – more money, nicer house, etc.

- So they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were in the land.
 - He also found that there were already people living there and kingdoms and nations living there? Abram might think “what am I gonna do about these people? I don’t even have a son or an heir” – but Abram didn’t think any of that. He moved according to the way that he knew: “The Lord said – so Abraham did as the Lord had said”
- Then the Lord appeared to Abram
 - This is the first time we see this word – The Lord **appeared** to Abram. This means Abram saw Him. The Lord **said** – Abram heard. Now the Lord **appeared** and Abram saw.
 - The Lord appearing is the next level above or past the Lord speaking. Seeing God is higher than hearing God. This is why in the Litany of the Gospel we say “blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear” – why don’t they just say ears/hear? We are going to listen to the gospel. Because the more someone hears God and listens and walks in God’s way, they will start to see God
 - When you see “appeared” – you should immediately recognize this as the Lord Jesus Christ; the Word of God; God the Son. Because God the Son is the One who appears in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Any prophet or apostle who has seen God has seen Him as Christ. “He who has seen Me has seen the Father; I am in the Father, and the Father in Me” (John 14:9)
- And said, “To your descendants I will give this land.”
 - Only after Abram followed God’s commandment until the very end, did he see God
 - If we follow God’s commandment until the end of our life, we will see God with our eyes
- And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.
 - Where did Abram get this idea of building an altar? Remember that Noah built an altar immediately after leaving the ark – and Abram is the tenth generation grandson of Noah – so this idea of an altar must have been passed down from generation to generation.
 - Altar
 - An altar is used to give thanks to God – every time God gives you something good, don’t forget to come to the Church and worship before the altar and offer thanksgiving.
 - An altar is also used as a place to make your request to God
 - The altar becomes a witness between man and God. And we will see it in Isaac, Jacob and Moses and David, etc.
 - Our Liturgy (work of the people) revolves around the altar – giving thanks to God, and requesting from God
 - Abram built altars before making for himself a habitation... the Church should come before your home. Your prayer should come before your work. Your spiritual life should come before anything else. What is due to God is before what is due to you or those around you
 - Abram does not really build himself a habitation, but is always on the move
- And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel

- Why did he move again? This was probably from God
- The place was **later** called “Bethel” (house of God) – we’ll keep seeing this place throughout the Old Testament people keep going and coming from it, and it kind of reminds us of the Church (house of God) and how we might sin but then come back and sin and come back.
- 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.
 - So what does it mean that Abraham called on the name of the Lord? What was he saying? What is the name of the Lord? Abraham doesn’t know a name for God, but he has heard his voice and seen him. In the New Testament we know His name “our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ”
 - And we won’t see a name for God with Abraham, or with Isaac. And when Jacob wrestles with God, he will ask him “what is Your name?” And God says “why is it that you ask about My name?” and doesn’t give a name. So He’s always just called “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob” – and then Moses has to go to Egypt and tell them God sent him and they ask “which god?” (because they are polytheistic) – so he tells God “all of their gods have names – I need to tell them Your name” and God says “tell them YHWH sent you” – YHWH (four consonants that cannot be pronounced in any language) and that mean “I AM” – the Being – the One who Is. “I AM” And God’s name becomes YHWH or “I AM” all the way until we find out His name is Emmanuel – God with us.
 - “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Joel 2:32), (Acts 2:21), (Romans 10:13)
- So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South.
 - So Abram (according to what God told him) kept on moving
- Now there was a famine in the land
 - Imagine God told him “blessing I will bless you” and all these nice things, and Abram listened and left his land, and his family, and his father’s house and was obedient and built all these altars and finally gets to this land and what happens? A famine.
- And Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land
 - And here we see one of Abram’s weaknesses
 - It’s so important to learn from the weaknesses of the saints, just as we learn from their virtue. Sometimes when we focus on their virtues, we may not be able to relate “how can I relate to a saint” – but when we remember their weaknesses, we feel they are so close to us
 - His weakness was a fear of famine, or worrying about what would happen if the famine reached him. And this weakness comes when one’s eye is looking at the world too much.
 - He didn’t see the famine and ask God “is this famine coming for me or not?” Maybe God would have told him “no the famine is for the Canaanites to repent – it won’t touch you” – but in this case, Abram was scared. We don’t hear that in this situation Abram prayed or talked to God or thought in a spiritual way. “There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down” – it is written geographically, of course, but the word “went down” indicates to us a spiritual decrease
 - “for the famine was severe in the land”

- It is as if Moses wanted to explain to us – that we should understand it was really hard on Abraham
- Tests of Faith
 - This is the first test of faith for Abraham
 - He’s building altars, obeying God, and then he’s hit with a famine. To put it in other terms... he’s attending liturgies and Sunday School and Bible Study and Praises and Vespers and suddenly, he’s hit with a famine. When hit with a famine, do we attach ourselves to God? Or to men?
 - A young woman who isn’t married finds herself needing love – is she to attach to worldly desires, go out and try to marry just anyone, etc. Or attach to the altar and let God choose for her?
 - Someone is getting older and feels that no one asks about him – does he search among the people for someone to ask about him, or attach to the altar and let God ask about him?
- And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, “Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, ‘This is his wife’; and they will kill me, but let you live. Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you.”
 - Sin begets sin. Sin leads to sin. When he was close to entering Egypt, he found out the Egyptians were brutal and might see that Sarai is beautiful, take her and kill him. If you knew that, would you continue your journey? Or turn around?
 - Abram is starting to think in the wrong way – not praying
 - Abram starting with “Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance” – he’s almost trying to appease her with these first words. Like when a man wants something from his wife so he gives her a few good words first. And she thinks it’s so nice – but really what he’s saying is not nice.
 - And Abram tells her “listen... these guys are pretty terrible. They might kill me and take you.” And you can imagine Sarai asking “okay should we go back?” and Abram says “nah let them take you as long as they let me live” – WHAT?! Abram!!!
 - This is not the personality of Abram! Lying, fear, worrying, earthly thinking
 - “Please say you are my sister”
 - Sarai was related to Abram – like the daughter of his father but not of his mother. A half-sibling. So you can imagine him convincing her like “we won’t *really* be lying” or calling it a “white lie” or a half-lie. But in the end, the cause is fear and because it is fear, it is a lie and a sin
 - “that it may be well with me for your sake”
 - As if “if I live I might be able to get you back”
 - “that I may live because of you”
 - Where is God in this? Abram’s thinking is completely off here
- So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful.
 - He who is scared of ghosts will always see them – Abram through fear gave himself in to the devil, and now the devil is taking advantage
 - Many times we make all the wrong decisions and take all the wrong paths and then say “why is God doing this to me” – you did it to yourself!

- The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh.
 - And the situation blew up – not just Egyptians it went all the way up to Pharaoh. As if God is trying to REALLY teach Abram a lesson.
- And the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house.
 - I wonder what Abram felt that day. A man without children, and his wife taken from him. And taken to Pharaoh's house – who can speak up against Pharaoh? And he is probably too embarrassed to even talk to God. He knows that it's his fault.
 - And what would he do? He can't go back to Canaan without Sarai – God's promise was for him to have descendants – how can he have descendants without Sarai? So everything God said came to a pause – not because God paused it, but because Abram paused it.
 - The devil plays games with us when we fall into a big sin or a big mistake or make a bad decision, the devil will whisper in our ear “can you really stand in front of God right now?” when in reality that is the time you most need to stand in front of God. To go and tell God “I am terrible” “I made a mistake” “Fix it for me” “I'm sorry”
- He treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels.
 - What profit is the sheep, oxen, donkeys, servants and camels without Sarai? What's the point of them if you've lost your wife, your children of promise, your land of Canaan, your altar?
 - “What profit is it to a man if he gains the world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26)
 - The people here are not sinning knowingly – they think she is his sister. And they are even giving him so many gifts. They did all of this in peace.
- But the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.
 - Who deserved this plague? Pharaoh? Or Abram?
 - God in this moment cannot leave Abram to be lost nor Sarai to be hurt – why? Because they are His children.
 - And we see this in our life – in the times when we have done everything wrong, and we aren't praying or fasting, we are surprised to find that God is there ready to take care of everything for us
- And Pharaoh called Abram and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, ‘She is my sister’? I might have taken her as my wife.
 - Pharaoh's words to Abram were probably the most effective – because who is Pharaoh? He did not hear God's voice, he did not see God, he did not know God – and yet he was rebuking Abraham.
 - Many times, we are rebuked or even feel rebuked, but people who do not know God – like Jonah when he told the mariners “I am running away from the God of heaven and earth and the sea and all therein” and they were like “seriously? Why would you do that?”
 - A wake-up call
 - In the beginning of the chapter, God told Abram he will be a blessing to the other people – and at the end of the chapter, Abram is the source of a curse for Pharaoh. And you can imagine what's going on through Abram's head – “if I had only gotten

permission from God, the whole land of Egypt would have been blessed by my present.”

- Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way.”
 - Another message for Abram – Go back to Canaan! Go back to the way of the Lord.
 - Many times these messages may come to us from those we least expect them.
- So Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had.

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