

Genesis Chapters 12-13 Summary - John Karmelich

One of the most common questions I'm asked is "How do I know I'm doing God's will?" A similar one is "How do I know when God wants me to do something specific?" In these two chapters God will tell a major bible character (Abraham) to move from his present location to the land of Israel. He promises Abraham that he'll be blessed financially for doing that and his descendants will inherit that land. I got to admit, I'd go for that deal if God told me to do that! We'll see him later in Chapter 12 go to Egypt due to a drought and tells a half-lie to the Egyptian leader that his wife is really his sister! His wife is good looking, and he says that to spare his life! After God made it clear to the Pharaoh via plagues that he is to let Abraham and his wife go, it leads to them and his nephew (Lot), to return to Israel unharmed. We then see Abraham asks Lot, "Choose either Israel or Jordan as a place where you'll live as I'll take what you don't pick!" To put it another way, Abraham didn't tell Lot, God gave me "Israel so you get Jordan whether you like it or not!" Yes, it was different names for those places in those days, but I'm trying to give you a visual! All that leads me back to how do we know when we're doing His will? So, did God want Abraham to go to Egypt? Was it God's will for Abraham to tell Lot, "You pick first despite what God promised me, and I'll take second choice?" I'll get to all of that in this lesson!

So before I get into chapter specifics, let's focus for a minute on discerning God's will for our lives. As I was once taught, "God doesn't say go brush your teeth this morning, it's just the right thing to do!" As most of you know by now, I believe in starting every day in prayer and asking God for His wisdom for the decisions I make through the day, and then make the best decisions I can! I also hold the view that we don't have to strain to hear God's voice. If He wants our attention, He'll find a way to communicate His will to us, end of the issue! For example, God never audibly says to me, "Teach this Bible book as your next project"! I just seems logical that's His will! Until information comes along that requires me to change that decision, I just go what's logical! My point as it relates to these chapters, is I believe we see Abraham trusting in God as Abraham did move to the land of Israel. He went to Egypt as it seemed logical to have fertile grazing ground for his animals during a drought. He gave Lot "first choice" since Abraham knew it was God's will for him to have the land of Israel and whatever Lot's choice, God will make it work out that Abraham's descendants will have that land as God promised. He made a promise that's unconditional and that's that! With that said, let's look at some details about these chapters, to see how they'll apply to our lives!

I always like to begin by "backing up". The previous two chapters focused on a specific line of people from Noah leading to Abraham. In effect that's a "plural" name as the text refers to him as Abram, but when God says Abraham has lots of descendants his name changes from Abram to Abraham. Since we know him as Abraham, let's keep it simple and just refer to him as that. He lived with his father not in, nor near the land of Israel. With that said, Chapter 12 opens with God speaking to him, and telling him to get out of where he's lived for decades. Based on a speech in Acts Chapter 7, God spoke to him after his father died. In short God made it somehow audibly clear that he had to move to what we call Israel. God promises Abraham (unconditionally) that he'll be blessed, and his name will be great. Verse 3 is a quote that most devout Christians can recite off their head, "I (God) will bless those that bless you, and curse those who curse you!" I can state with great truth the fact Abraham is a respected name, not only in Judaism and Christianity but also in the Muslim faith! In fact, my favorite T-Shirt when I visited the country of Israel was one that listed all the great empires that ruled over Israel that came and left, yet it is the nation of Israel that still stands today. God made the universe. yet there is a unique piece of land that God says is "His" and let's just say it's dangerous to mess with that fact!

Although that promise of a great nation was still over 400 years in the future, the way Abraham knew it was true as God also promised to make Abraham rich (measured in livestock then). The text states that he was 75 when this occurred. Realize he and his wife Sarah had no children and she's a year younger. Still Abraham figured if God said it, then it's going to happen. In the New Testament it states that he is righteous, a quote from Genesis that I'll discuss in the next lesson. Abraham earned that status since he because he believed God and not because he did anything to prove his worth to God!

Anyway Verse 4 to 9 are about him, his wife and his nephew Lot making the journey and wandering all around the land of Israel. Maybe he traveled around the land to check it out, but more likely it was due to the fact he was shepherding a large flock with lots of servants and needed grazing land. In Verse 7 is God confirming that promise to reassure him. Then Abraham built an altar to God out of gratitude just for the fact God chose him for all of this. By the way, the text says Abraham built altars to God in lots of places to show gratitude! By Verse 9 he is with his flock and gang (including all his servants) in the desert (between Israel and Egypt). Then he decides to go to Egypt due to a severe famine in Israel. Did God cause the famine to get Abraham moving? Probably! How did it affect others who lived there? It isn't discussed as the chapters focus on Abraham, and his traveling group.

The rest of the chapter is simply facts without any comment from God as if to say, "We the readers are to decide if what he did was right or wrong!" The first thing we learn is Abraham had so much respect for the beauty of his 74-year old wife, (we learn later she was a year younger) that when they get to the border of Egypt his orders to Sarah is to not state she was his wife but only his sister. Apparently, she's so beautiful word worked its way up the command to the Pharaoh himself, who was willing to take her as a wife for himself. She was also Abraham's half-sister, (allowed in those days as the bloodline didn't have the corruption it has today)! All of this says a lot about Sarah being obedient to Abraham as to go along with the deception. Since God told Abraham his descendants would inherit the land of Israel as a possession, so maybe he just figured traveling to Egypt was God's problem to work out!

Bottom line somehow there were plagues on the Pharaoh's house (it is not the same Pharaoh as we read of in Exodus. It's just a title like Caesar became much later!) The Pharaoh figured out the plagues were due to taking Sarah (called Sarai before she had children) as his wife. Anyway, Pharaoh told Abraham, Sarah and Lot to take their stuff and, "Get out and don't come back" (not exactly like the plagues that is taught in Exodus, but close enough that one sees the obvious similarity to THE exodus centuries later)! God didn't speak during that whole episode but made His will "loud and clear" by the actions that took place. That is a reminder that God often (but not guaranteed) speaks by the way circumstances unfold!

That leads to Chapter 13 back in Israel. Here we get the famous "family split" where Lot chooses what we call the Jordan Valley and the location that will be the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah that is a big topic in the next lesson! As I stated in the beginning, Abraham didn't say to Lot, "Dude, God stated clearly I'm to get Israel so get over there and no complaining!" Instead, Abraham says in effect we got lots of stuff and we're family, so you choose where you want to live, and I'll pick second. That's trust in God to work out the details! The key point is Lot picked the Jordan Valley as it looked before God did turn into waste land due to Sodom and Gomorrah stuff. Verse 13 says the men of Sodom were sinners before God. (Let's just say the word Sodomy came from Sodom. I'll get into that in the next lesson!)

Of course, after the family split, we get God telling Abraham again, the land of Israel is "his and those descendants that God decides it belongs to (his son Isaac and Isaac's son Jacob etc.)" Keep in mind we have Abraham and Sarah before they were renamed with no children at roughly 75. God tells him that he will have so many descendants in effect they are uncountable! Because Abraham believed God, we

read he walked the land to check it out and settled at the same spot where he first came to in Israel, and he built an alter to God there!

OK John, most of us know this story well. What does this have to do with discerning His will? God is speaking to us every time we open our bible. Thirty percent of the bible is predictions that came true to this day (Remember what I said about Israel surviving as a nation). So even if God never speaks to us, "face to face" He is more than willing to guide our lives for His glory if and only if we're willing to use our lives for His glory! Just as God has made it obvious to me how He's wanted to use my life, He will work with each of us at any age if we're willing to trust in Him for guidance!

On the same page as this study is a more detailed study I wrote many years back. You are welcome to email me if you want or join my list to the get the latest lesson. Thanks for reading. John