

Triennial Torah Study – 4th Year 07/12/2013 _ _ _ _ .

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Gen 13	Judges 5-6	Ps 29-30	Mat 17:22 – 18:35
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Abram and Lot; Expansion of the Promises (Genesis 13)

The story of the separation of Lot from Abram gives us a concise and interesting picture of Abram and how he dealt with others, as well as how he trusted God. When he and Lot returned to Canaan from Egypt, both were rich and had large flocks and herds. But as pasturage and water were in short supply, with all their possessions it was inevitable that strife would result. When the trouble came, Abram took the lead in resolving the dispute. Though he could have made the decision unilaterally, being the elder, the patriarch of the clan and possibly Lot's foster father (since his real father had died years earlier, Genesis 11:28), he instead behaved himself with deference, care and entreaty. Not only was this an act of good will and humility, but it was also an act of faith—for Abram trusted that God would make good whatever would fall to him as a result of Lot's choice. Abram's motivation, faith and conduct are an example for all of us.

Lot's motivation, faith and conduct here are also an example for all of us—and, as the results would show, not the best example for us. Lot saw the richness of the well-watered Jordan River valley and chose to dwell among the cities of the plain—"toward" Sodom (verse 12, KJV). At the time he simply made the best choice human reason would indicate. However, when we next meet Lot he is no longer dwelling "toward" Sodom but actually living *in* it (Genesis 14:12). Later we find him even sitting in the gate participating in that evil city's government (19:1). Though a "righteous man" who was severely troubled by the depravity of the people of Sodom (2 Peter 2:7-8), he was nevertheless corrupted by it, to the point of offering his daughters to be sexually assaulted (Genesis 19:8) rather than trusting in God's protection (although it is possible that this was a lying ploy, which still shows lack of trust in God). When we last see Lot, though delivered with his life and posterity, his life is in shambles. He has lost his possessions in Sodom's destruction, he has lost at least two married daughters who remain behind (compare verses 12-15), he has lost his wife to the desire for Sodom instilled in her by living there (verse 26), and he has incestuously fathered children by both his remaining daughters (verse 30 ff.). The lesson is clear: Seeking our own paths without God's guidance and

immersing ourselves in a corrupt environment can gradually seduce us into the ways of the world and lead eventually to ruin.

After Abram and Lot separated, God appeared to Abram. He told Abram to look toward the four cardinal directions, surveying the land of Canaan. All that he could see, God assured him, would be given to him and his seed forever. In addition, God expanded His promises by telling Abram he would have vast numbers of descendants. It is probably significant that this incident occurs after Abram had expressed faith in God's providence by giving Lot first choice as to where he would dwell and pasture his flocks.

The Song of Deborah (Judges 5)

"The Song of Deborah is one of the finest examples of an ode of triumph preserved in Israelite literature.[with] a vividness, an almost staccato effect of action and a spirit of sheer exultation" (*Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, chapter 5 summary). The song celebrates the outcome related in our previous reading—a most unexpected deliverance from an apparently unconquerable and desperately cruel foe.

Considering all that transpired, the opening lines of the song are most instructive: "When leaders lead in Israel, when the people willingly offer themselves, Bless the Lord!" While this is not an exact translation of the Hebrew here, the idiom used being somewhat obscure, it does perhaps convey the intent behind it. And the sentiment is certainly a true one in any case. For strong, fearless, visionary leadership combined with a people who willingly offer themselves to God produces an irresistibly powerful and successful combination. Wherever there is vacillation and little success among God's people, at least one of these two factors is missing.

The song gives some very interesting details of God's maneuvering in the deliverance from Jabin, as well as the conditions of Israel's servitude to that terrible king. Verses 4-5 reveal that God caused a major rainstorm just before or during the battle. No doubt the muddy ground mired the heavy iron chariots of Jabin, vastly reducing his army's strength and demoralizing his troops. God often uses weather to confound armies, and it has even apparently happened in modern times.

Verses 6-9 reveal the severity of Jabin's oppression. Main highways were desolate of traveler, whether trader or pilgrim; all took the rougher unknown, but safe, trails through the hill country. Moreover, the many small Israelite villages were under constant fear of destruction, and as a result many were depopulated, the people either moving to larger cities or preferring tent dwelling, as did Jael.

Verse 20 has been interpreted in several ways, with some scholars preferring to understand it as an ironic slap at the Canaanite practice of astrology, while others view the stars as symbolic of real heavenly forces, implying that Israel had angelic help in its fight against Jabin. Another explanation is that the reference is to meteors.

Gideon's First Works (Judges 6)

Deborah and Barak's victory brought Israel 40 years of independence and peace. But Israel again did evil in the sight of God, and God once again delivered them over to their enemies, this time the Midianites. For seven years the Midianites, with smaller contingents of Amalekites and Mesopotamians, would raid Israel during harvest seasons, swooping down and confiscating all the produce of the fields. Many Israelites took to the hills to live in caves, no doubt because the invaders would seize even the foodstuffs stored in houses, and dwelling in highland caves provided a place both of security and of safe storage.

Gideon was a Manassite, but of the smallest of that tribe's clans, and he himself the "least" in the house of his father—implying the smallest, youngest, least important or least thought of. In any case, he was clearly not a man of any considerable wealth or influence. But God often works through the unknown and apparently insignificant. This is also true of New Testament times (see 1 Corinthians 1:26).

During this oppression, God, through His prophet, plainly told Israel why they were being oppressed (verses 8-10). Yet, when the Angel of the Lord—who seems to have been the Lord Himself in this case (compare verses 12, 14, 16, 23), i.e., the preincarnate Christ as messenger of the Father (compare Genesis 16:10-13)—appeared to Gideon, Gideon asked why all this had happened. Apparently few paid any heed to the words of the prophets. Nevertheless, the time for punishment was to be ended, and God had chosen Gideon as the instrument of that deliverance.

Our introduction to Gideon is somewhat humorous. He is threshing wheat not out in the open on a threshing floor as would normally be the case, but hidden in a winepress out of fear of the Midianites stealing the grain from him. Yet this divine Messenger's first words to fearful Gideon are, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!" (verse 12). "Both statements seemed absurd. First of all, where was the God of Israel? Second, anyone with eyes to see could know that he was no mighty man of valor. Gallant generals and fearless warriors did not hide from the enemy in winepresses" (Phillip Keller, *Mighty Man of Valor*, 1979, p. 25). But God often refers to people according to what they will become. Gideon certainly didn't come across as mighty or valorous initially, but by believing and trusting in God, he ultimately lived up to the confidence God placed in him and truly became a mighty warrior, a man of valor. Interestingly, the name Gideon itself actually meant "Hewer," "Feller" or "One Who Cuts Down," perhaps implying an *overcomer*. And after God's calling, Gideon would begin fulfilling the meaning of his name.

His first action was to destroy the local altar to Baal—another sign that few Israelites were listening to God's prophets. When the local officials sought to put him to death, Gideon's father Joash challenged them to let Baal prove his own divinity by taking vengeance on Gideon through some supernatural means. The challenge was ironic, because it would show Baal completely incapable of taking vengeance upon anyone—Midianite, Amalekite, Mesopotamian

or even the smallest, most insignificant man in Manasseh. Of course, nothing happened. Joash then called Gideon by the name Jerubbaal (“Let Baal Plead” or “Let Baal Take Revenge”), thus making him a living taunt to the worshipers of Baal.

The destruction of the altar, and the confounding of the Baal devotees, gave evidence to Gideon that God was on his side. He would need the encouragement of that thought, for then the seasonal raids of the Midianites and their confederates commenced. When they appeared, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he gathered an army from Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali—again, only a few of the tribes of Israel.

While the Spirit of the Lord had come upon Gideon, he had as yet developed little faith. He required another sign from God that God would truly deliver Midian into his hands. While this was probably for his own sake, he may also have felt it necessary for the Israelites to know, with the evidence of such signs, that God had chosen him to fight the battle. In any event, God did perform the famous fleece signs. Gideon, we can see, was still used to walking by sight, not faith. Nevertheless, the success of his enterprise was not to come from his strength but God’s. The signs were given, and Gideon was emboldened.

Psalm 29

is a worship hymn composed by David “in praise of the King of creation, whose glory is trumpeted by the thunderclaps [constituting His “voice”] that rumble through the cloudy mass of winter’s rainstorms as they rise above the Mediterranean (“the mighty waters,” v. 3 [NIV]), and move from east to west across the face of the sky” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on Psalm 29). The thunderclouds cover the whole land of Israel, from the northern forests of Lebanon and Sirion, denoting Mount Hermon, to the southern Desert of Kadesh (verses 6, 8).

The booming thunder shakes the ground (verses 4, 6, 8) and terrifies wild deer into giving birth prematurely (verse 9). With the thunder come “flashes of lightning” (verse 7, NIV), these strikes splintering great trees in two (verse 5) and stripping the forests bare (verse 9).

David calls on the “mighty ones” to ascribe to God the glory due Him as the Almighty Creator (verses 1-2). The phrase translated “mighty ones” here literally reads “sons of God,” this expression appearing to denote God’s angels, which are referred to this way in the book of Job (Job 1:6; 38:7).

At God’s great display of power in nature, everyone “in His temple” expresses awe (Psalm 29:9). As David wrote this before the building of the physical temple, it seems that the temple in heaven is intended—especially given David’s urging to the angels in verse 1. However, some suggest that David may be referring to all of creation as God’s temple.

The NKJV translates verse 10 as saying that “the Lord sat enthroned at the Flood”—that is, the Flood of Noah’s day. The NIV, however, renders this in the present tense: “The Lord sits enthroned over the flood.” The latter seems likely, given that the great thunderstorm was accompanied by torrential flash flooding in the desert wadis. However, all of this could well

have brought to mind the former Flood, a product of God's sovereign rule over the natural realm. Moreover, a great flood is also symbolic of chaotic, threatening circumstances (compare Psalm 32:6-7).

As a final thought in Psalm 29, David considers in verse 11 that it is this same great and powerful God who empowers His people—and blesses His people not with the destruction witnessed in nature but, as all forces are subject to Him, with peace.

The translation of the superscription of **Psalm 30** is disputed. The KJV and NKJV explain the psalm as a “song at the dedication of the house of David”—evidently referring to the king's royal palace. The NIV and others, though, think the translation should be “A song. For the dedication of the temple. Of David.” The Hebrew word here is *beyt*—“house” in a general sense. Yet the idea of the latter translation is that *le-David*, as in other psalms, should denote authorship rather than any connection with this house. And “the house” on its own can be a designation for the temple, the house of the Lord—though it could also refer to the palace.

Considering the very personal and specific nature of this psalm with regard to the life of the psalmist, it does not seem to fit very well with the dedication of the temple, which took place several years after David's death. The most likely conclusion appears to be that this psalm was written by David to be sung at the dedication of his palace. For this reason, we earlier read Psalm 30 in the Bible Reading Program in conjunction with other passages concerning that period (see the Bible Reading Program comments on 1 Chronicles 14; 2 Samuel 5:11-25; 1 Chronicles 3:5-9; Psalm 30).

David reflects on the events that have led up to the joyful occasion of his now-firm establishment at Jerusalem. He praises God for lifting him up, healing him, keeping him alive (verses 1-3). He thanks God for not letting his enemies rejoice over him (verse 1). Indeed, David's enemies now have no cause to rejoice because God has overturned his prior circumstances: “You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness” (verse 11).

This is to serve as an example to all of God's people—they are always to praise Him for He will ultimately turn hard and dark times to light and joy (verses 4-5). This is especially good to remember in the years before us as we approach the darkening end of the age.

In verse 6, David declares that he is now prosperous and firmly established. He further says to God, “By Your favor You have made my mountain stand strong” (verse 7). The reference here “may be to David's security in his mountain fortress, Zion; or that mountain fortress may here serve as a metaphor for David's state as a vigorous and victorious king, the ‘mountain’ on which he sat with such secure confidence in God” (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, note on verse 7).

David ends the psalm with an important reason God has lifted him out of affliction. “You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy *so that my heart*

may sing to you and not be silent" (verse 12, NIV). All of God's people have been called out of spiritual darkness to do the same—to sing praise and give thanks (1 Peter 2:9-10).

God is intimately attuned to the fact that we can endure only so much. (Typically, He knows we can endure more than we would choose to on our own!) The promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13 remains a comfort to us when we are afflicted: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

Mat 17:22 – 18:35

24 Doth not your master pay tribute?

This is in reference to the Temple tax that all Jews were to pay to support the work of the Temple. This tax is also an atonement, according to the Torah.

Exodus 30:11-16 – *And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them. This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is twenty gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD. Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the LORD. The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when they give an offering unto the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls. And thou shalt take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; that it may be a memorial unto the children of Israel before the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls.*

26 Then are the children free.

Does Yeshua teach breaking of the Torah here by saying this?

No, for the same reason found in Matthew 12, when Yeshua was challenged as to the behavior of his disciples on the Sabbath. If the religious authorities recognized who Yeshua was, they would have realized that they had a greater "Tabernacle/Temple" before them, in the form the Messiah.

Yeshua's presence among them took priority over the physical Temple, which was (in this sense only), a "lesser" representation of the image of God and His Kingdom, (a "shadow," i.e., Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5, 10:1). Yeshua is above the physical Temple as He is the actual image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). Note however, that after His death, his disciples continued to attend the Temple for services and sacrifices, but no longer for the Yom Kippur sacrifice (as we will explain in our other studies).

Nonetheless, Yeshua commanded His disciples to pay the tax, for reason explained below.

27 Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them

Note that although Yeshua was “correct,” in that His presence initiated a higher level of Torah commandment, He deferred to the principle of setting aside His “right” for the benefit of others. This is an important principle we will discuss in our [Romans study](#).

Matthew 18

1 Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

It is possible that the disciples (who are still in the process of learning the mysteries of the Kingdom from Yeshua), were thinking in terms of “might” or “wisdom” when they asked this. Yeshua turns this question around to show who the “greatest” really are.

3 Except ye be converted, and become as little children,

The full explanation of “being converted” is in verse 4, where Yeshua shows this has to do with humility. As mentioned earlier, Moses is said to be the most humble man to ever live as well as the greatest of the prophets until Yeshua’s time. (See also comments to verse 19.)

8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee

Here we have a similar teaching to that of the parables in chapter 13, where Yeshua compared the Kingdom to a pearl and to a field, in both cases showing that nothing was of more value. The allegorical reference to “hand or thy foot” could mean many things, including false doctrines. (See also comments to verse 19.)

10 in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father

This could be a reference to “guardian angels,” a belief that seemed to have been held by Yeshua’s disciples as seen in Acts 12:15. As we discuss in our [Revelation study](#), there also seem to be angels assigned to Israel and to the nations of the world.

17 let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

God is revealed to us in His attributes of both justice and mercy. Justice is seen in this teaching. Compare this to the mercy taught in the parable beginning in verse 23. The various attributes of God, as we perceive them, is a subject of our [Revelation study](#).

19 if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

Many critics will point to the countless unanswered prayers of people, as evidence that Yeshua's statement isn't true. Many answers are given in response to this challenge, however the words of scripture can't be ignored:

James 4:3-6 – *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.*

The adultery James speaks of, as the source of prayer not being answered, is spiritual adultery, as seen by his description of it being “*friendship of the world.*” As said throughout this study, the way of God is the light of Torah. Outside of Torah is darkness – “the way of the world.”

We like to think that we're “out of the dark ages” with regard to receiving spiritual light from God. However, with the overwhelming number of people in the world today rejecting either the written Torah (in the case of most of Christianity) or Yeshua, the walking Torah, (in the case of most of Judaism), is it any wonder that God's blessings are not as prevalent as they should be?

“James” (Jacob) says, “*We ask amiss.*” Amiss of what? Amiss of the will of God, which is revealed through His Torah. He reiterates that God's grace (answer to prayer) is given to the humble. Humility comes from denying ourselves and accepting His Torah. Spiritual pride/arrogance comes from rejecting Torah in favor of some other religious belief that allows for “picking and choosing” from the commandments of God.

Some would here interject, “What about the Holy Spirit? Doesn't the Spirit reveal to us the will of God? The answer is Yes – but the will of God that the Spirit will reveal IS His Torah. The Spirit will make clear to us the deeper meaning of the Torah and how to apply it in our lives. The Spirit will never lead anyone against God's Torah. If someone “prays to the Spirit” and is told that God's Torah is not for today, they are hearing from a spirit that is not of God.

Paul gives the same message as “James,” – If you consider yourself not subject to God's Torah, you are of the world, and not of the Spirit:

Romans 8:7 – *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.*

20 where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Exactly how is Yeshua “in our midst” if He is presently seated at the right hand of the Father? Does this mean He is simply “looking down at us?” Or is there a literal presence in the “spiritual realm” that “surrounds” us here on earth – and if so, how does this all work?

Although Yeshua's statement can, in a simple sense, be accepted “on faith,” the concept of God's presence within creation is actually a very complex area of Bible study.

23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king ...

This parable was discussed earlier in our study.