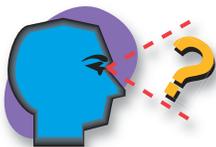




Genesis

Responses to the Questions



NOTE; BE SURE TO ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS YOURSELF BEFORE READING THE ANSWERS IN ORDER TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY.

Abram Returns to Canaan

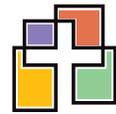
Read Genesis 13:1-13

1. Abram's return to the first altar he had built, at Bethel, and his calling on the name of the Lord suggest that he desires to make a fresh start in the life with God he had begun. Because of the plagues on Pharaoh's household, surely he was aware that the Lord was displeased with his behavior in Egypt. He perhaps feels the need to demonstrate that he wants to live in a way that brings honor to God's name. It is a beautiful picture of the appropriate response of men when they stumble into sin. Unlike Cain, who let his sin turn into wholesale rebellion against God (Gen. 4:6-8), Abram returns and does what is right.
2. Abram's wealth meant that he and Lot could not dwell together on the land. This created strife in the family, which leads to a separation. It is worth taking note that this first mention of great wealth in the Scripture is associated with unhappiness and lack of peace. This will become a constant theme in the rest of Scripture. It is no surprise, then, when Jesus tells His followers not to bother laying up treasures on earth. If the heart of man is so closely connected to his treasures, better that he should build treasures in heaven, where there can be no threat to happiness or peace (see Matt. 6:19-21).
3. Abram seems to strongly desire peace in his family. He generously offered Lot the first choice of the land. Being the head of the family and Lot's elder, he could rightfully have laid claim to the first choice and best of the land. He seems to prize peace more than good land. He is not a selfish man.
4. Lot's eyes told him to choose the land that looked like Paradise (vs. 10). He wanted for himself the land that appeared to be the absolute best. The text tells us that the valley that looked so beautiful to Lot was the home of Sodom, a city of great wickedness. The language here is reminiscent of the scene in Eden, when Eve sized up the forbidden fruit. Looks can be deceiving.

The Lord Renews His Promise

Read Genesis 13:14-18

5. If Abram's descendants were ever to become a "great nation," as God had promised, the first thing they would need was land. Tribes of people without land of their own remain just that—tribes of people. God told Abram to take a good look at the land itself. This was the concrete reality that lay before his eyes. The land was real to him; the promise of descendants to fill it was still a hope, which depended entirely on God's trustworthiness. This is reminiscent of God's use of the rainbow with Noah. He uses here a concrete reality within nature as a sign of His promise to act. In the Church, God continues to do this in the sacraments.



Responses to the Questions (cont.)

Catholic Scripture Study

The Lord Renews His Promise (cont.)

Abram may have been thinking the same kind of thoughts we think when we approach a sacrament. "All I see here is land-dirt, rocks, bushes. God says this will be the home of my great nation. I don't have any kids, and my wife is barren. Can I really believe this?" In the sacraments, we are always faced with these very human questions. "This is just water on a baby's head. Is this child really being washed from original sin and given the Holy Spirit?" "This looks and tastes like bread and wine. Can I really believe that I am eating the Body and Blood of the Lord and that it will give me eternal life?" When we think those thoughts, we are much like Abram, walking through that desert land, pondering the promises of God. That is why his response will be of interest to us.

6. Abram builds an altar to the Lord at Hebron. It is an act of reverence, worship, and faith. He must have mulled it all over and come to the conclusion that God was worthy to be adored this way. Building an altar was his acknowledgment of trust in the promises of God.

7. The verses in Hebrews tell us that faith is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Picture Abram walking through the land of Canaan, observing all its physical characteristics and trying to imagine his descendants living there as a great nation. When he builds an altar to the Lord, he is giving evidence of a trust in unseen realities. He performs an act of confidence in God, believing that He will do what He has promised. This is the essence of faith. It is like what Noah did when he built an ark on dry ground. It acknowledges that God, Who cannot be seen, can nevertheless be trusted completely. The sacraments call forth just such faith. When we exercise that faith, we are standing with Abram, the father of faith, allowing what we can see to confirm what we can't.

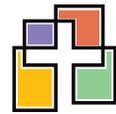
Abram Goes to Battle Read Genesis 14:1-16

8. Abram had earlier showed himself to be a man dedicated to his family. He shows, by his rescue of Lot, that this love has not diminished and that it is a fearless love. He demonstrates courage and ingenuity in defeating the enemy. Because of the intensity of the battles that had raged, he might easily have talked himself out of such a risky operation. In addition, he could have justifiably left Lot to live with the consequences of choosing to live in Sodom, a wicked city. His decision to go immediately to Lot's rescue, whatever the cost, reveals him to be strong and free in his love for his nephew. He is willing and able to do what is right.

The Blessing of Melchizedek Read Genesis 14:17-24

9. Melchizedek brings out with him an offering of bread and wine. When Jesus takes up the bread and wine at the Last Supper, He is fulfilling His priestly service. These elements represent a priestly sacrifice. When He tells the apostles to repeat this ritual of the bread and wine, He is commissioning them as priests as well. They will represent Him in this liturgical act, making the same offering as Melchizedek. (This is why priests in the Catholic Church become "fathers"-it is a domestic priesthood.)

10. Abram does not want to be indebted to the king of Sodom. That kind of debt could present problems for him in a variety of ways, so he turns down the offer for great personal gain.



Responses to the Questions (cont.)

Catholic Scripture Study

The Blessing of Melchizedek (cont.)

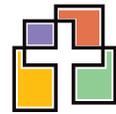
11. Responses will vary. Abram has good reasons to be proud and triumphant after his victory. These two kings represent two possible reactions to this kind of human accomplishment. The king of Sodom offers Abram material gain; the king of Salem offers him a blessing, with bread and wine. Abram responds in humility, making an offering of his own. It is a picture of what all of us face as we make our way through this world on our journey home to God. Do we grasp at what we can see and touch, or do we swear allegiance to God Most High, and let go of perhaps the little that we have? Abram shows us the way.

12. During the Mass, after the Liturgy of the Word and before the Liturgy of the Eucharist, our tithes and offerings are collected and then presented to the priest, before the altar. The priest is the presence of Jesus, High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. Our presentation of these tithes is a fulfillment of what Abram offered to Melchizedek. It is our heartfelt thanks to God for His abundant and merciful blessings on us. We, like Abram, are on a journey to receive a great gift. Our lives are constantly touched by God's deliverance, and we, like him, respond with thanksgiving and offerings of a tenth of all we own. He is worthy of such.

13. It is interesting to see that Abram has an answer ready for the king of Sodom, when the offer for gain is presented. It is possible that when he first learned of Lot's predicament, he spoke to God about it all. Perhaps he asked for God's help in making the rescue. Melchizedek's blessing on Abram suggests that God answered this prayer ("blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hands"). Is it possible that God warned him to stand firm in the face of temptation to be drawn under the influence of the king of Sodom? Abram seems to have understood very well that he would have to appear to be coming to the rescue of the wicked as well as the good. Yet his solemn vow to God ("I have sworn to the LORD God Most High") shows that he was able to distinguish one from the other and to maintain his proper allegiance. This is reminiscent of the temptation the devil laid before Jesus in the desert. "The devil took Him to a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to Him, 'all these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.' Then the devil left him." (Matt. 4:8-11)

14. These three men, recipients of Abram's generosity, would perhaps be more likely to remain his allies, respecting him as a just man. Considering the hostilities that raged in the land, Abram would be wise to consolidate this kind of alliance. In this, Abram is an example of what Jesus, many years later, would teach His followers: "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." (Matt. 10:16)

15. Responses will vary. Abram is observable to us in these chapters as one who is growing in reverence for God and man. In his dealings with men, he is devoted to his family, willing to act in a generously unselfish way in order to settle a dispute that threatens peace. This family solidarity leads him to act courageously to rescue Lot, doing whatever it takes to free him from harm. He seems to be a just man who acts wisely in his dealings with men, knowing when to remain detached from them and when to seal alliances.



Responses to the Questions (cont.)

Catholic Scripture Study

The Blessing of Melchizedek (cont.)

In his dealings with God, Abram is a man who has humility. He is one who turns toward God, not away, when he stumbles. As he contemplates the almost unthinkable promise that God has made to him, he performs an act of reverence and faith. When Abram is met by Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High, he receives a blessing from him, a sign of finding favor in God's sight. Abram's response of giving the priest a tenth of everything shows him to be someone who is beginning to deeply comprehend that if God is "maker of heaven and earth," as Melchizedek calls Him (14:19), then He is worthy of generous offerings. Perhaps this is why he is able to be detached from the temptation to become indebted to the king of a wicked city, declaring a vow of allegiance to God.

Abram is thus coming into focus as a man we can respect. He learns from his mistakes, has a deep reverence for God, acts courageously for the sake of love, acts wisely and unselfishly for the sake of peace, and recognizes that God is supreme over all and worthy of undivided loyalty.