



Lot's Dilemma

Palestine

Before dying, Abraham had taken three saplings from the tamarisks that he had planted near his well in Beersheba to his nephew Lot. He had asked Lot to plant these saplings in Jerusalem, and to take care of them, so that the living work of his hands could survive in the holy city. Without hesitation, Lot did what his uncle had asked him to do. Not long after, Abraham went to meet his Lord without his mortal flesh.

The tamarisks quickly adapted to the terrain and climate of Jerusalem, as it was more friendly than the dryness of the Negev desert, but they did not grow. After some time, seeing that the little trees neither grew nor died, Lot gradually stopped coming to take care of them.

One day, when Lot was old and feeling himself close to death, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said:

'Lot, you have forgotten the trees that your uncle, Abraham, asked you to take care of. In fact, you have not watered them for a long time.'

Lot admitted to himself that what the angel said was true.

'Oh, well ...' he answered, uncomfortably. 'You're right. I have not taken care of them for a long time. But the tamarisk is a desert tree, capable of surviving with very little water.'

The angel said nothing. He simply stared at Lot silently, with the hint of a smile on his glowing face.

Lot lowered his head. He had forgotten those trees and perhaps that was the ultimate reason why they had not grown. 'In truth,' he reflected to himself, 'I would like those trees to be seen, their shade to be enjoyed, by the children of my grandchildren, and by all the generations of my descendants and of my uncle's descendants that come after.'

Satisfied that Lot had understood his message, the angel spoke again:

'If you want the trees to grow and shade the children of your grandchildren and all your descendants after, so that they remember and bless you, you must water them with water taken from the Jordan River.'

Thus, willingly following the instructions provided by the angel, Lot took out a waterskin, emptied its contents over the roots of the jasmine that grew next to the door of his house and set off in the direction of the River Jordan.

As he was returning from the river, his waterskin filled with the precious water, a pilgrim approached him asking for a drink. Lot looked at the man and saw that his lips were cracked and parched after long hours walking. Feeling compassion for him, Lot handed him the waterskin along with his blessings. The pilgrim emptied the waterskin with relish.

'You were very thirsty,' Lot said to the man, who, after giving Lot a grateful smile, continued on his way to the holy city with renewed vigour.

Lot watched him go with a deep sense of peace in his heart and then he turned around and retraced his steps to the river.

Loaded again with the blessed water of the Jordan River and on the way back to Jerusalem, Lot met a farmer who, having overloaded his donkey, now cried at seeing her sprawled in the middle of the road. Lot felt a deep sorrow for the animal and, while the farmer quickly unloaded his packages from the poor beast's back, he cupped his hand under her mouth, and filled it with the miraculous water of the Jordan so that she could drink.

Soon, the donkey regained a sparkle in her eyes and stood up as if nothing had happened. The farmer thanked Lot by raising his praises to the Heavens.

As he watched, the man continued on his way, walking next to the donkey, sharing the load with the animal, Lot found that his waterskin was empty again ... and suddenly he felt very tired.

He felt that all the force of life was leaving him and he knew that he would not be able to make a third trip to the river.

‘I will not be able to water my uncle Abraham’s tamarisks,’ he said to himself in a whisper, as he dropped to the ground, knowing that death had come to meet him.

At that moment, the angel of the Lord appeared again.

‘I’m not going to be able to water the trees with water from the Jordan water as you told me,’ Lot said, sadly.

‘Do not worry, Lot,’ the angel answered with a smile that flooded the old man’s soul with peace. ‘In exchange for your loving acts, first with the pilgrim and then with the donkey and her owner, I will personally water the tamarisks that Abraham put in your charge. I will do so for two hundred years, and they will grow to shade your descendants for seven generations, and beyond.’

Upon hearing these words, Lot closed his eyes in peace. When he emerged from his carnal envelope, Lot understood, in the glow of his new consciousness, why he needed to take care of everyone and everything: because everything was part of himself, of his own being. □

Adapted by Grian A. Cutanda (2019).

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Comments

The tamarisk is, among other things, a symbol of hospitality and, hence, of care and attention. In addition, by the fact of commemorating

the alliance with Abimelech, king of Gerar of the Philistine people, on the well of Beersheba, tamarisk also points to the rights on water.

Sources

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Umberger, M. (2012). Abraham's tamarisk. *Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament* 1.2 (2012), 189-200. Retrieved from <http://jesot.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/JESOT-1.2-Umberger.pdf>.

Associated text of the Earth Charter

Principle 9a: Guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter, and safe sanitation, allocating the national and international resources required.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Principle 5e: Manage the use of renewable resources such as water, soil, forest products, and marine life in ways that do not exceed rates of regeneration and that protect the health of ecosystems.

