

(c)Dr Russell Jay Hendel; Jun 2026

VERSE: Gn13-14a (Paragraphs) Gn13-07a.

Here is an outline of Gn12-06 through Gn13-14.

•Gn12-06: The Canaanites were in the land at that time(2): God appeared to Abraham and said **your descendants(1) will inherit this land**

•Abraham is forced to leave Canaan because of the famine and travels to Egypt.(3)

•...Abraham and Lot had many more possessions than the land had resources for; there arose disputes between Abraham's and Lot's sheppards even though the Canaanites were (2) at that time in the land so they separated

•*(Gn13-14) After Lot separated from Abraham (3) God told him: Look at the breadth and depth of this land because **it will(1) be given to you and your descendants**

NOTES: (1) Gn12-06 through Gn13-14 stand as one biblical paragraph; the paragraph structure is indicated by the repeating bolded phrase **the land will be given to you and your descendants**. In English, a paragraph structure is indicated by either white space prior and after the paragraph, or by indentation, or by both white space and indentation. Such formatting indicates that the group of sentences inbetween constitutes one paragraph with a central theme that is developed. In Biblical Hebrew, the paragraph is indicated by a repeated opening and closing phrase with sentences inbetween. The theme of this paragraph should be clear: Abraham's descendants *will* inherit the land. The reason why the land is not being given immediately is stated in another verse: (Gn15-16) *Four generations from now your descendants will have this land because the Emorite sins (justifying their banishment) will not be complete till that time*. Note how the first set of sentences after the introductory phrase in the paragraph – the sentences that indicate that Abraham could not stay in the land that was promised to be eventually his because of a famine forcing him to leave it – is consistent with the nuance that acquisition of the land will happen in the future.

(2)(3) Also consistent with the *future* fulfillment of the promise is the phrase that *the Canaanites were then in the land* is also consistent with this and the explanation given in Gn15-16. The second set of sentences in the paragraph (after Abram's descent to Egypt)

states that there was a conflict between Lot's Shepards and Abram's Shepards; but the text does not specify the cause of the conflict. Three explanations are offered.

#1) Rashi consistent with the theme of future inheritance (not now) suggests that Shepards allowed sheep to graze freely in Canaan even though the land was not yet theirs. In other words these Shepards reasoned that since this land will belong to Abraham eventually they have the right to graze in it now. Consistent with this explanation of Rashi, is the narrative marked "(3)", that God only reiterated and provided more detail on the future inheritance, *after* Lot left. God did not tell Abraham details since Lot's shepherds misinterpreted the prophecies as applying now.

#2) The Ramban cites Rashi and demurs: *The simple meaning of the text is that they had a dispute because (as explicitly stated), "they had many assets and the land's resources were not enough for them.* It is easy to refute the Ramban. Generally, Rashi explanations can offer both interpretations based on immediate verse text as well as interpretations based on the surrounding text. Other commentators such as Ramban and Ibn Ezra were not aware of the grammar of surrounding text (In fact this grammar of surrounding text known as pragmatics is modern and Ramban and Ibn Ezra unlike Rashi based their knowledge of Grammar on the models at that time of the Arab grammarians.) So the Ramban is perfectly correct that *if you only read v5-6 the dispute was because of insufficient resources.* However, if you read v5-6 in the context of the entire paragraph which addresses future possession of the land, Rashi's explanation is superior.

#3) Ibn Ezra interprets the word *then* in the phrases (indicated by "(2)" above) to mean immediately then. According to the Ibn Ezra the Canaanites had just conquered the land as indicated by *then* which he interprets *immediately then*. However, the Ibn Ezra's principle while correct for verbs (*then* does typically indicate *just then*), for nouns and noun phrases *then* can simply indicate emphasis. Compare the following examples illustrating this:

•Gn24-41 (*then* after a verb), Then (meaning: then and not before),when my family does not want to give you a wife, you will be free from my oath

•2S23-14 2S23-14, (*then*) at that time David was already dwelling in Metzudah or Job18-21 did you know the time (*then*) you were going to be born and have many years

Thus the current text, *The Canaanites where then in the land* (with *then* preceding a noun phrase, *in the land*) is simply emphasizing and echoing the statement in Gn15-16 that the land that God promised Abraham was already occupied and wasn't yet his.