

HOME IS WHERE THE LORD IS

GENESIS 13:1-18 DECEMBER 1, 2021

We live in an area where people love to talk about where they want to live other than here. The Central Valley seems to be one of the fountainheads of the #calexit mentality, as people see greener pastures in states to the east. I'm guessing a sizable number of people in this room have either known friends who have left or have personally contemplated moving.

Where you live matters, in a lot of different ways. And, it's true, some places are nicer than others. Some places are more affordable than others. Some have a greater saturation of sinfulness than others. There are many factors that go through our minds when it comes to deciding this important issue. And, if you are one of the many people thinking about a longterm plan to leave California for one oasis or another, I'm not going to say that you're not allowed to pursue that desire. I *will* say that God definitely has an opinion on where you live. He has countless providential intentions for your life. And He knows all of the factors of the where, when, who, and how that will shape your life. He knows what influences will enhance your life for your good and His glory and which influences will corrupt your life, your family, and your testimony.

The story of Abraham is about God drawing a family to Himself and teaching them to not only *understand* His ways, but to follow *in* those ways. This is the same life of faith we're to live out as Christians today. Where God wants us to live is a significant part of that.

Luckily, the Bible presents us with detailed accounts of *real* people who were working through these very same issues and it shows us what made the difference between fatal disaster and fantastic development.

Of course, in a broader our text tonight is about more than just where you live. It gives us insight into how to answer the question of "What's next for my life?" How should I continue, whether I'm packing up or staying put? These are important questions, so let's take a look at God's opinions.

Genesis 13:1 - Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev—he, his wife, and all he had, and Lot with him.

We saw Abraham's disastrous trip down to Egypt and how, while trying to escape a famine, he got caught up in compromise. Now he's making the very same trip but in reverse.

We get hints of some relational things going on here: First, Sarah is once again called his *wife*. In Egypt he had forgotten his duty as a husband and had used her as a bargaining chip. I'm sure their relationship had some sore spots, but things were back as they should be. We also see Lot listed, almost as a tag-along. "Abraham, his wife, all he had...oh and Lot, too."¹

¹ Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

Genesis 13:2 - ²Abram was very rich in livestock, silver, and gold.

Jesus said it is very difficult for rich people to follow God, but it isn't impossible. It's easy to take on a doctrinal mentality which says that poverty is automatically piety and wealth is automatically wicked. That isn't true. It *is* true that wealth is very dangerous. We're warned again and again about how it can take hold of our hearts and our attention and how it can drive us away from God - just look at the Rich Young Ruler. But material abundance isn't automatically an evil thing. To the contrary, material abundance *can* be used in wonderful ways for the Lord's work.

Bob Edmiston is Great Britain's first, vocally Christian billionaire.² As an evangelical, he recognizes that *we* are called to spread the Gospel. And so, since 1998, he has donated over \$150,000,000 to organizations, like *Christian Vision* - which he founded - which has presented the Gospel to more than 38 million people worldwide.³

Now, for every Bob, there are probably many Christians who have decided to pursue wealth at the cost of their faith. They gave up serving or giving or growing in the Lord because the overtime pay was too good or some other financial reason. The heart is the issue and what that wealth does to your relationship with Jesus that matters, not whether you have it or not.

Genesis 13:3-4 - ³He went by stages from the Negev to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had formerly been, ⁴to the site where he had built the altar. And Abram called on the name of the Lord there.

Abraham goes *back* to the very place where he had previously been in personal communion with God. It's a picture of repentance. Going to Egypt was wrong. Coming to this altar, he recognizes that *God* had not failed him, but *he* had left God. And he recognizes that *he* needs cleansing the covering by the holiness of God *and* he recognizes that God will *receive* him back, just as before.

This was quite a trip - more than 400 miles. To give you perspective, if you walked to Tijuana you'd still have 100 miles to go! But Abraham was willing to go the distance because this was where he belonged. As we read the story, we see his change of heart. In chapter 12 his focus was on grass for his flocks. Now, what is his attention on? The *altar*. Notice: There's no discussion here of the famine or where his sheep are going to eat. All he cares about is getting back to Bethel. And - what a surprise - when he's in close relationship to the Lord, the famine is no longer a factor for him.

Genesis 13:5 - ⁵Now Lot, who was traveling with Abram, also had flocks, herds, and tents.

We get the sense that there is a growing independence in the mind of Lot. He's got his own thing going. He has separated out his own stuff, his own interests. These two men are in the same place, both wealthy, but we'll see the hearts are radically different. The mindsets are poles apart.

² <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/praise-the-lord-im-a-billionaire-0hsnk8kzn>

³ <https://www.cvglobal.co/impact-stats/>

Genesis 13:6-7 - ⁶But the land was unable to support them as long as they stayed together, for they had so many possessions that they could not stay together, ⁷and there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock. (At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were living in the land.)

Bruce Waltke points out that in the previous chapter, Abraham had all sorts of difficulty because of the *lack* brought about by the famine. But here, there’s tension and difficulty because of material *abundance*.⁴ What that tells us is that it isn’t our *circumstances* that determine our spiritual health. Paul specifically taught that our spiritual wellness is independent from worldly events or our state of affairs. In abundance or in lack we are able to commune with God and grow with Him and do His will. It’s a matter of obedience and proper perspective on our part.

This quarreling also drives home an important truth: Things are not always better when you have more. Their great abundance was causing relational problems where there hadn’t been before.

We’re given that note about the Canaanites and Perizzites at the end. It’s possible that these people controlled all the good grazing spots and water in the area, leaving Abraham and Lot just scraps to work with.⁵ But it’s also possible that this family quarrel had become very *public* and was being watched by the unbelievers in the region. In fact, in later parts of the Bible, the word used for “quarreling” is used for legal disputes.⁶

When Christian disagreements spill out into the public it is a very damaging thing. Because it destroys the testimony God wants to share through you. As Abraham met people, he would’ve said, “I’m new here. The One True God has called me out of all others to be the father of a new nation through whom all the world will be blessed.”

“Uh-huh. Is that your herdsman fist-fighting with your nephew’s herdsman there in the pasture?”

Testimony and disputes are still very real factors in our Christian lives. We’re going to find ourselves in them from time to time. That’s normal and - in some cases - it’s *beneficial*. Read what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11. But when Christians fight about material things, like we’re seeing these herdsmen doing here, it is a terrible blight on the name of Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul rebukes the church there for their selfish, public quarreling. He says, “How *dare* you take these disputes in front of unbelievers!” The Christian life is not defined by constantly demanding our rights, but laying down ourselves for the sake of the Lord. Abraham understood the priority of peace in this situation.

Genesis 13:8 - ⁸So Abram said to Lot, “Please, let’s not have quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, since we are relatives.

⁴ Waltke

⁵ *Bible Knowledge Commentary*

⁶ *NET Study Bible Notes*

Family relationship was a higher priority. The testimony of God was a higher priority. As they work through this conflict, it's important to remember that Abraham is the one in authority. He has the right to demand whatever he wanted and Lot had little recourse. But, in that position of strength and authority, we see Abraham speaking humbly and kindly to his nephew. He doesn't vent anger, he doesn't start pointing fingers. His goal is peace if they can get it in a Godly way.

Genesis 13:9 - ⁹Isn't the whole land before you? Separate from me: if you go to the left, I will go to the right; if you go to the right, I will go to the left."

We see that Abraham really wants peace in the situation and we know he really loves Lot, but it's clear that he has realized that the solution is separation. In Romans 12, Paul says, "If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."⁷ Abraham has come to the conclusion that living together isn't going to work anymore. Their life goals and mentalities are too far apart.

If you find yourself in a dispute with a family member, or someone in the family of faith, it may be that the best solution is that you distance yourselves. Now, Abraham doesn't disown Lot or say, "You're dead to me!" Or anything like that. In fact, he's going to risk his own life for Lot in the very next chapter. But, for now, there was going to have to be some distance between them. And to bring an end to hostility, Abraham did some hard things. He sacrificed his rights and he parted ways with someone he really cared about.

Genesis 13:10 - ¹⁰Lot looked out and saw that the entire plain of the Jordan as far as Zoar was well watered everywhere like the Lord's garden and the land of Egypt. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)

Lot doesn't take a trip to the altar to seek the Lord. He takes a sight-seeing trip to scope out irrigation. Notice what clinches the choice for him: The Jordan plain was *just like Egypt*. Lot had become enamored of Egypt during their visit. While Abraham was concerned with how he could get back to fellowship with God, Lot is thinking, "How can I get back to the Egyptian style?"

In *The Merchant Of Venice*, Shakespeare made famous the line: "All that glitters is not gold." Lot will learn the hard way. He chose where to live - he chose what's next in life - based on the glittering promises of wealth and stability and luxury. And few stories end in as appalling and ghastly ways as Lot's. And, remember - Lot was a believer. A 'righteous' man, Peter declares to our astonishment. But he assumed he knew what was best for his future and didn't bother to consult the Lord.

Genesis 13:11 - ¹¹So Lot chose the entire plain of the Jordan for himself. Then Lot journeyed eastward, and they separated from each other.

The one time Abraham speaks in this passage we see him talking about "us" and "we" and "our." And here we see Lot chose...*for himself*. Abraham's mentality was, "What can I give?" Lot's was, "What can I get?" And he moves out to the east. As we've seen before, in Genesis, eastward

⁷ Romans 12:18

movements coincide with separation from God.⁸ Adam and Eve, Cain, the Babel builders. Lot has made a very bad decision. And it was one that undoubtedly hurt Abraham quite a bit. He loved Lot. We'll see that proven more than once in future chapters. But, doing the right thing, going God's way, isn't always easy. Sometimes it costs in painful ways.

Genesis 13:12-13 - ¹²Abram lived in the land of Canaan, but Lot lived in the cities on the plain and set up his tent near Sodom. ¹³(Now the men of Sodom were evil, sinning immensely against the Lord.)

We see another comparison here. Abraham lived in Canaan, but clearly he was not mingled in with the people. Lot, on the other hand, got in the mix almost immediately. Of course, this is a representation of the command we've been given to be in the world but not of the world.⁹

We're given a second eerie foreshadowing of something that is going to go down at Sodom and Gomorrah. Most of you know the story, but, leading up to it, we should be very concerned for Lot and his family. The people he is choosing to live his life among were shockingly evil. Lot is ignoring very clear, very significant factors, because the grass is so green! One commentator points out that Lot thought he was in Paradise, but in reality he was nearly plunged into hellfire.¹⁰

So where *would* Abraham live?

Genesis 13:14-15 - ¹⁴After Lot had separated from him, the Lord said to Abram, "Look from the place where you are. Look north and south, east and west, ¹⁵for I will give you and your offspring forever all the land that you see.

With Lot leaving, perhaps Abraham must've felt the sting of abandonment. But in that moment of isolation, the Lord comes and reveals many great things to Abraham, not least of which was what *God* had not left or separated from them. He was still with them, everywhere they went.

The Lord sends Abraham on a sightseeing tour. He says, "It's all yours!" Now, we must pay attention to this promise. This was a true, literal promise *forever*. It was not a spiritual analogy, it was a literal guarantee. *That* valley to the south. *That* stream on your west. *Those* hills out front. All of it belongs to Abraham's literal, physical descendants forever. God has not and will not go back on His word.

Genesis 13:16 - ¹⁶I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust of the earth, then your offspring could be counted.

The Lord promised they would soon have children of their own and that they would have a perpetual family, safe in the providence of God. And, though the world and Satan have come

⁸ CSB Study Bible Notes

⁹ John 15:19 Romans 12:2 1 John 2:15

¹⁰ John Calvin *Genesis*

against God's chosen people with all their terrible might, still God sustains the Children of Abraham.

Genesis 13:17 - ¹⁷Get up and walk around the land, through its length and width, for I will give it to you."

Abraham had already seen a lot of the land. After all, coming from Haran he would've come from the north. He traveled through the length once on his way to Egypt, a second time on his way back to Bethel. But here the Lord says, "Go take another look."

It's a good reminder that, in the Christian life, there is going to be a lot of re-treading over things the Lord has already shown us. From the beginning of your walk with the Lord you heard that God loves you. But God wants you to tread over that truth over and over. From the start, hopefully, you learned that salvation is by grace and that our Christianity is accomplished in grace. That is a pathway that we should walk again and again. Principles and promises concerning mercy and patience and obedience and self-control and so many others are things we should adventure through again and again as we follow after God.

It's interesting: This would include the land Lot has chosen for himself.¹¹ As Christians, we've been promised that we will inherit the earth. Those things which we forfeit in the here and now for the sake of our walk with the Lord are well worth it.

Genesis 13:18 - ¹⁸So Abram moved his tent and went to live near the oaks of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord.

After his trip, the Lord led Abraham to settle in Hebron, about 20 miles south of Jerusalem. He *immediately* built another altar. While Lot worried about waterways, Abraham was worried about the way he could commune with God and worship in His presence.

The difference in mindset couldn't be clearer. Abraham needed to know what was next, so did Lot. One took his own counsel, the other had learned that God not only knew the better choice, but that God *wanted to choose for him*.

In our lives, there's a lot to be decided. But, God knows if that oasis out on the horizon is actually just a mirage. He will not fail to lead us on and so our part is to relinquish the right to guide ourselves and instead stay in intimate communion with the Lord, and follow Him. It may be to abundance, it may be to reduction of material assets. But, we can trust Him. Home is where the Lord is. Though none go with us, still we must follow, no turning back.

¹¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Israel-land.html>