

ABRAM AND LOT SEPARATE

Genesis 13:1-18
Key Verse: 13:15

Lesson 7a

"All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever."

Abram and Lot had begun the life of faith together, for Lot had gone with Abram when he answered God's call to leave his home country and go to Canaan. Lot learned the life of faith from Abram. He is called a "righteous man" in 2 Peter 2:7,8. He is an example of a "worldly Christian." He wants to live the life of faith because he knows that it is the best life, but he wants to enjoy the simple and "harmless" pleasures of the world, too. In this lesson, Lot makes a fateful decision.

1. A new beginning (1-4)

Abram went to Egypt because of a material problem--the famine in Canaan. In spite of his weakness and mistakes, God helped him, and now he returned to Canaan a wealthy man--and a wiser man. The first thing he did was to go to the altar he had built before, the one between Bethel and Ai, and call on the name of the Lord. He repented and made a new start. He made a decision to depend on God, not on himself. This meant that he made a new decision of faith to put his trust wholly in the Lord.

2. Lot's choice

Lot had gone with him to Egypt, and Lot also returned with him. Lot also became wealthy. Lot was Abram's nephew, and Abram loved him like a son. Lot, however, had his own idea. He and his flocks and herds moved about with Abram, but he kept his possessions separate, looking forward to the time when he would go out on his own.

Soon, a practical problem arose. It was a side-effect of God's abundant material blessing. The land would not support the herds and flocks of both Abram and Lot. There was not enough grazing land and not enough water in one place for them both. So the herdsmen of Abram and the herdsmen of Lot began to quarrel over grazing land. To further complicate matters, the Canaanites were also living in the land. If Abram's and Lot's people quarreled and fought, they would be easy prey for hostile and greedy neighbors.

Perhaps Abram would have liked it if Lot had made a commitment to live with him like his son, but he realized that the time had come for Lot to make a decision of his own. Abram did not want material things to come between them. In Egypt, he had lied about his wife so that the Egyptians would treat him well. He was too selfish to think about how much his wife would suffer. He had learned a bitter lesson. This time, he put people before material things. His relationship with Lot was more precious than material things. He called Lot and said, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left." So he gave Lot first choice of the land and opened the door for him to go out and be independent. He reminds us of the father in the parable of the prodigal son.

Lot was selfish. He didn't think about stepping back and giving his old uncle first choice. He didn't even consider reducing his herds and flocks to stay with Abram. He looked up and saw the whole plain of the Jordan. He saw that it was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt. Lot had spiritual desire--he longed for the lost paradise, the garden of the Lord. He also had worldly desire. He really liked life in the culturally advanced country of Egypt. He had contracted the "cultural sickness" and he longed to live in a city and enjoy the protection and privileges and cultural advantages of city life. The schools seemed better and there seemed to be better advantages for his daughters. He was ready to leave the simple and rough life of living in tents and moving from place to place. So he chose the plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east, toward Sodom. The author gives us a hint about what is to come by his parenthetical remark: "This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah."

Their separation seems like a small thing, but it set the direction of two lives. The author says, "Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom." He goes on to say, "Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord." (12,13) Abram lived in the land of promise, the land of God's blessing. Lot did not go into Sodom at first, but he moved closer and closer. He knew what he was doing. He thought that he could live in Sodom and enjoy the world, and the same time, keep his faith. Lot surely did not intend to abandon his faith. He did not intend to become one of those who joined the people of Sodom in sinning greatly against the Lord. He only wanted to enjoy some of the benefits of living near Sodom--and later, in Sodom. (2 Pe 2:7,8 refers to Lot as a righteous man.) Later on we see the tragic consequences of Lot's decision to move away from Abram toward Sodom. We must realize that a man cannot serve both God and mammon. A Christian cannot deliberately choose to live a compromised life and be blessed. Rather, a Christian who tries to do so will suffer even more than one who totally belongs to the world. We will see the consequences of his decision when we study chapter 19.

2. God's promise (14-18)

Verse 14 begins, "The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him..." Lot's departure left a big hole in Abram's life. Perhaps he had known for a long time that Lot would leave him. In a way, Lot was a casualty of his own failure in Egypt. But when Lot actually left, it was hard. He missed Lot. He was lonely. Lot was like a son. He had not felt his childless problem so keenly as long as Lot was moving about with him. Now, his childlessness really hit him. Furthermore, he had given the best land to Lot, and Lot had taken it without a second thought. Abram must have had a sense of loss.

So, just at this time the Lord came to him. The Lord gave him some physical exercise. He made Abram come out of his tent, climb a high hill and look out over the land. Then, he told him to take a long walk, to walk through the length and breadth of the land, and to walk with his head high, like the owner of the land. God promised to give him all the land his eyes could see--including the land he had just given to Lot. Not only this, God promised to give him offspring as numerous as the dust of the earth. Who can count the dust? And who can count Abram's offspring?

Abram believed this promise. We know that he believed it because of what he did. He took a long walk south to Hebron, and he built an altar there to the Lord. He worshipped God. His act of worship was an act of faith. He gave his wounded heart to God. He no longer felt that he had lost something, because he now had a deed to the whole land. It was a deed made over to him by the Owner and Possessor of all things. Abram solved his material security problem by accepting God's word of promise. He would never again run from a famine or allow material things to dominate his heart and life. He believed God, and he believed God's blessing.

This promise of God was not new; it was the same promise Abram had believed when he left Haran and came to Canaan. This promise was like his Bible. God would remind him of this promise at least 3 more times--times of crisis in his life. Each time, God helped Abram with his word of promise. God did not help him with any tangible thing. Stephen says of him, "He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child." (Acts 7:5)

Our choices are important. We must learn to make choices based on faith in God's promises, not on human calculations. And we must find our real security in God and in his promises.