

## A Choice

Genesis 13:1-18

This chapter gives us an opportunity to identify one of the greatest dangers we might face in reading and studying OT passages. It is the danger of reading a Bible story and then concluding, “This is the moral of the story.” When we do that, we reduce God’s infallible revelation of himself to a series of disconnected moral lessons, and we lose the sense of God’s ultimate purpose in salvation.

Lots of people and commentators read Genesis 13, only to say, “What a great lesson on how to get along with people.” Or they conclude, “It’s better to separate from other people, even other Christians, than to generate increased friction.” And that’s about it in Genesis 13.

Well, Abraham’s graciousness is a good example for us to follow, and Lot’s selfishness is a common source of friction. But that’s not what this chapter is all about. I will not reduce this very significant event to the level of a good story with a good moral. There is much, much more.

This account fits into the overall account of the history of God’s people, the history of redemption, the history of salvation. This account has everything to do with Jesus Christ, and everything to do with God’s sovereignty in election. It has everything to do with God fulfilling his sovereign will and purpose.

Ultimately, the separation of Abraham and Lot falls into this great plan of God, to fulfill his covenant promise of salvation through the chosen line. The covenant promise comes through Seth, not Cain. Then Noah, and Shem, not Ham or Japheth. Then through the generations to Nahor. Then of Nahor’s sons, the line

of God’s chosen people is through Abraham, not Lot’s father Haran. Then through Isaac and not Esau. And finally the twelve tribes of Jacob.

What Genesis 13 is all about is the confirmation of God’s choice of Abraham. And God confirms his choice through the means of choices that Abraham and Lot themselves make. We’ll study those choices, but not just as moral object lessons. We’ll study the choices of Abraham and Lot, choices which are integral events in God’s working out his covenant of grace with the people of Israel.

First Abraham’s choice. It was good one here. He was, no doubt, humbled and repentant after the disaster in Egypt, which we studied last Sunday. It is difficult to study Abraham as we did then, in the deception of his lie and the consequences he suffered for lack of faith. We don’t often think of him that way, for he remains the chief example of faith in Scripture. That faith was restored under God’s fatherly discipline. Now, the events of his trip to Egypt are in the past, and Abraham is back to his more normal experience, that of walking by faith.

### I. ABRAHAM’S CHOICE REFLECTS HIS FAITH IN GOD.

His choice was to respond graciously to the situation with Lot.  
v.7-9

That was very generous of Abraham. He was the elder, Lot’s uncle. He had the right to insist on his own way. Yet in his personal, practical wisdom, he succeeded in eliminating the friction that had arisen between him and Lot by giving up that right. He let Lot make the first choice, completely free to choose whatever land he wanted. And what enabled Abraham to make such a gracious decision? He was, at this point, again walking by faith. Such faith is obvious in these verses. We see that,

**A. Abraham had faith to worship the God who directed his path.**

Abraham's focus was again, on worship. As it had been before he went into Egypt.

12:7

12:8

So now we read,  
v.1-2

He is retracing his steps, seemingly demonstrating his repentance and godly sorrow for going down to Egypt. His wife is with him again, and what a blessing that must have been. God is so gracious! Abram was able to retain all his wealth, possessions Pharaoh might well have confiscated in exiling Abraham. But he didn't. By God's grace, everything was restored to Abraham. And so he travels up from Egypt, north to the Sinai Peninsula, then on to the area called Negev. The word means south country, and from the vantage point of Jerusalem, that is exactly what it was. From Egypt, however, it was north.

Abraham returns to the last place where he had built an altar, Bethel. And he called on the name of the Lord in worship.  
v.3-4

All of that demonstrates that Abraham, once again, is walking by faith. He is following God, going where the Lord commands. The troubles in Egypt are behind him. He has turned from his sin, and the Lord has forgiven him. With that restored fellowship, with that depth of devotion and genuine worship, Abraham's perspective was different. He no longer had to look out for his own best interests. The Lord would take care of him, so we see that,

**B. Abraham had faith to trust in God's provision for every need.**

That's the lesson he learned in Egypt. Remember that the first difficulty he encountered in Canaan had brought about a different response.

12:10

That decision, as we studied last week, was likely made with no thought of seeking the Lord's will or advice. Abraham had a problem. Abraham trusted in his own strength and wisdom to solve that problem. Abraham failed. Not so here in chapter 13.

Abraham faces another problem, however. This promised land, flowing with milk and honey, wasn't doing very well. Not a famine this time, but the land couldn't sustain both Abraham and Lot, with their vast company of men and animals.

v.5-6

As a result, there was conflict.  
v.7

Had he responded as he did before, he likely would have asserted his right and authority over his nephew Lot. Remember Lot's father was Abraham's brother. Abraham was the uncle. He was the one who had received God's call. The promise had been made to him and to his seed. He had the right to demand the best part of the land and to put Lot away wherever he chose.

But at this point, Abraham didn't have to worry about how he would survive, for a man who walks by faith knows that God will provide for all his needs. He understood the lesson Jesus would later teach,

Matt. 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one

and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. 25 “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Trusting God, Abraham let’s Lot make the choice.  
v.8-9

What we see so clearly is that,

## **II. LOT’S CHOICE REFLECTS HIS INTEREST IN THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD.**

He chose the plains of the Jordan River, the land which appeared the most fruitful.

v.11

What a contrast. Lot was impulsive. He was sensuous. He

was materialistic. He was filled with the lust of the eyes. Simply put, he chose that which looked the best to him.

### **A. Lot chose what looked good in his own eyes.** v.10-11

Such a luxurious description. The plain of the Jordan was well-watered. Like the garden of the Lord. Like the Garden of Eden. No greater comparison was possible. It looked great!

There was in those days, no doubt, still abundant rainfall and the temperature was likely much more pleasant, though the area is now much more desolate and almost unbearably hot. This land looked prosperous like the land of Egypt. Lot had been infected with the luxury and the excitement of Egypt, and was no longer content to be a “stranger and a pilgrim in the land.” He looked down to the plain of the Jordan River, as it flows into the Salt Sea, where there were five prosperous, exciting cities, and decided that was where he would like to be.

Lot no doubt remembered the riches and comfort he had enjoyed in Ur of the Chaldeans. He liked the things that he had. He liked having fun. He liked being comfortable and happy. So he made his choice. He chose what looked good in his own ways.

How easy it is for us to do that very thing! How easy it is, how tempting it is, to make our decisions based upon what we see with our eyes? “This looks good, I’ll do this.”

The lust of the eyes. Desire that is never satisfied. Selfishness that is never brought under control. And such a poor basis for making any decision, let alone such a significant, life-changing one. And how often we find ourselves tempted by the

same values, the values of this world. We choose what looks good to our own eyes.

One of the best ways to judge the values of a culture is to evaluate popular advertising. Commercials, printed ads, online ads, Facebook ads and Amazon adds all reveal what a culture holds valuable, because they are specifically designed to sell. The the advertising agencies have done all their homework.

Radio has to appeal primarily to the mind, for it is not visual. And although newspapers and magazines are visual, they are still one-dimensional. And static--they don't move. That is what is so dangerous, so appealing about our computer and television screens, where advertisers make their direct appeal to the lust of the eyes. And believe me, American consumers are just like Lot. They choose what looks good to their own eyes. And the particular power of visual and video advertising, and the reason it is so unimaginably expensive, is because it appeals to the eyes. So beware of the appeal to your own eyes, the lust of the eyes.

There is another danger shown forth by Lot's decision. It's a danger we as Christians face in our culture, as well. It's the danger of ignoring the value system of our culture. Lot looked at the land, and it looked good in his own eyes, so he chose it. But he forgot to look at one crucial thing--the people who lived in that land!

**B. Lot ignored the sinfulness of those with whom he would live.**

And they were sinful.

v.12-13

We'll see more of that sinfulness in chapter 19, but it's important to realize that that reputation of wickedness was well

known even when Lot chose to live among them. He no doubt craved the excitement offered by the activity of those prosperous cities. And his cravings caused him to ignore the danger signs. Rampant wickedness. As a man professing to walk with God, he should have shunned such wickedness. Instead, he drew near to it.

At first, he didn't go and make his home right in Sodom, but "pitched his tent even as far as Sodom." He tried to avoid the wickedness, even though he enjoyed the excitement of it. He tried to get as close as he could without contaminating himself. And what's the danger of that? To use a common proverb, If you play with fire, you will get burned.

What happened to Lot? Did he keep his distance from Sodom? Unfortunately, we read that he did not. Rather quickly, he came to actually live in Sodom.

Gen. 14:11 "Then they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. 12 They also took Lot, Abram's brother's son who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed."

And finally, he not only lived in the city, but was prominent at the city gate. He was a civic and business leader in the city, this city of wicked and rebellious sinners.

Gen. 19:1 "Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground."

How often it is that Christians attempt to keep their purity or righteousness, but still wishing to enjoy the pleasures of this world, they closely imitate the ways of the world. They wonder why they fall into terrible sin. Sexual immorality is a great

example. As is the way we use money. What videos or movies we watch. The people we spend time with and with whom we build deep friendships. Too often we simply ignore the sinfulness of those with whom we choose to live our lives. And we are surprised when we fall into the same sin.

In Lot's case, as we'll see in weeks to come, this choice would ultimately destroy him and his family. People today face those same consequences. So when it comes to close, personal, intimate relationships, we should shun those who are openly wicked and sinful. We should separate ourselves from close associations with those whose lives reflect the values of this world, those who don't love God. And we should build our close friendships with people who share a devotion to God.

In the words of,

Ps. 1:1. "Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper. 4 The ungodly are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish."

Thus we should live our lives, and make our choices, reflecting the faith of Abraham and not the worldliness of Lot. However, even deeper than that, there is still one great element in this story I have left untouched. God's choice. Ultimately, this separation between Abraham and Lot is a matter of God's choice. And,

### **III. GOD'S CHOICE REFLECTS HIS SOVEREIGN WILL.**

Notice something in the last five verses. The Lord speaks the word of his covenant promise to Abraham. He makes specific the calling Abraham had already received, showing Abraham the exact land which would be his. He defines the promise of chapter 12, intensifying it and giving the promise specific details. At this point, the promise is Abraham's.

v.14-17

But go back to verse 14. This promise was made "to Abram AFTER Lot had separated from him." AFTER Lot had parted. Again, why was that? Because God's covenant promise was made to Abraham and his seed. Not to the seed of his brother Haran. The covenant promise did not extend to Lot!

#### **A. God sovereignly chose Abraham, not Lot.**

Over and over again in these chapters of Genesis we see God's sovereign purpose being applied to his chosen line, and I am not reading that into the text because I'm a Presbyterian who believes in predestination. NO, I'm a Presbyterian who believes in predestination because Scripture is filled with the obvious description of the outworking of God's sovereign purpose in election. And we are taught the doctrine so explicitly in,

Eph. 1:11 "In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will."

And when it comes to Abraham's own children, the same principle is applied.

Rom.9:10 "And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac 11 (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), 12 it was said to her, "The older shall

serve the younger.” 13 As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”

God gives this promise to Abraham alone. AFTER Lot separated. According to his own sovereign purpose. So AFTER Lot leaves, we learn exactly what the promise of the covenant is.

**B. God sovereignly promises Abraham an unmeasurable land and uncountable descendants.**

What a glorious promise.

v.14-15

I can't imagine that Abraham, with all his faith, even expected a promise so great as that one. Surely the extent of that promise must have stunned him.

v.14b-15

God was so gracious and so personal,  
v.17

Remember Abraham's faith, the faith to believe the certainty of this promise even without the physical realization of it. Even though he walked the land, Abraham didn't literally own any part of this land. Instead, as I've read so often,

Hebr. 11:10 "...he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

And further down, in,

Hebr. 11:13 "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called

to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."

What, then, is the ultimate fulfillment of this great promise of land? None other than the new heaven and the new earth.

Rev. 21:1 "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."

Rev. 21:10 "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal."

The promise of the land looks forward to the new heavens and the new earth. And the promise of the uncountable descendants has the same focus.

v.16-17

The children of Abraham would be uncountable, as the dust of the earth. Imagine such a promise, imagine trying to count the grains of dust, the grains of sand. Absolutely impossible. Absolutely uncountable. And who are those descendants? To whom does this promise refer?

Gal. 3:7 "Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham."

Further,

Gal.3:9 “So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.”

Then,

Gal.3:13 “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

This covenant promise given to Abraham, is for us. It is the promise of a new earth, the promise of a new age in which there is no sin, an age that will last for eternity and during which all the wicked will endure endless punishment and destruction.

So how should we, today, respond to his promise, and to this sermon? What is the practical value of all of this? Well, first of all, from Abraham’s explicit example, hearing this promise, worship God.

v.18

Build an altar and worship. And as you worship, as you think of this great promise, fix your eyes upon God, not upon the things of this world. Focus your thoughts and your desires upon God, not upon yourself.

Col. 3:1 “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”

And so, dear friends, as those who are the descendants of

Abraham according to God’s eternal purpose, as those who have received this great promise of the land, walk by faith.

Heb. 12:1 “...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

“Set your mind on things above...looking unto Jesus.”