

## Genesis 13

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Separated to be a blessing

"if you choose... then I shall choose"

"You take the high road and I'll take the low road and I'll be in Scotland before you." So said the old song. It was a song of challenge and of "one-upsmanship." It was a song of fun and a song of faith all the while. And in the same way, our story will take us today. Sort of challenge and confidence, sort of a generous spirit as well. If you will, please, carry on, you have the lead; I'll go the other way.

Our story picks up today a few years on, after Genesis 12. Abraham, once an Iraqi asylum seeker and refugee, is now a rich man. He was thriving in the area known as the Negev, or southland. Today we know it as a desert, and perhaps it was then as well. So the family of Abram moved up north to Hebron and Bethel, and set up camp. It was the Eastern Suburbs for sure as Abram lived in wealth and comfort, as well as worship.

Then a conflict arose. And it is that conflict which will mark the Children of God over against the children of the enemy again. It is the ancient conflict and it is the perpetual one. Augustine's two cities are again evident in Abram and Lot. This is sort of like watching Sunday replays of the weekend in footy. Same plays, over and over, same near misses, knock ons, tries, video referees, kicks, penalties... over and over.

But with different players, in different coloured uniforms. But it's the same story, isn't it? One team will triumph and the other will hang its head in shame and defeat.

So it is here. Whether it was Cain vs Abel or Seth; Noah and his generation of sinners; the daughters of men and the sons of God, etc... the story is retold in each successive section led by another famous man of faith. Same story; different players.

Let's read today's episode. Read Genesis 13.

Today's story is a sad one. Its scenes are simply put: First, the separation of the family, and 2<sup>nd</sup>, the viewing of the Land of Promise.

Let's look at the first, the separation of family. The idea of a separation is never comfortable in family matters. As I type this here in Sydney, my wife has been in the US for about 3 weeks. She went to take Anne our youngest to the Jews for Jesus summer camp, Camp Gilgal. I was privileged to start that ministry in 1991 in Pennsylvania and now there are several camps throughout the US and children from 8-17 coming to learn more about Y'shua and being Jewish. It's a great thing that I hope some will want to see here in Australia as well.

So Patty is now collecting Anne at camp, then returning to Kansas City to see the family again. Separation for even a few weeks is not easy. It's not a pleasure. Relationships are pleasure and separation is discomfort. To me, that's the sad part about today's story in the Bible. Lot is noted as being "with Abram" several times already in the text (11.31, 12.4, 5) and will be again in 14.12, 16. This notation is significant. Lot is not just a drop in into the story. He is the counterpart to the man of

God, and is later called 'righteous Lot' in the Newer Testament. So don't go bagging him already, and don't knock him ever. But he did some wrong things, and for those he will lose seriously, but in the end he is still righteous, which is really about God and not about Lot. [2Pet. 2:7 and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men] But Lot does lose out on relationship with his uncle, which is perhaps the harshest lesson of them all.

Lot is in relationship to his uncle and should have and I believe DID learn about God from him. He went on the travels from Haran through Canaan to Egypt, and there they both grew in wealth. Lot traveled with his uncle back through the Negev to the place of the altar in Bethel. And it is there that our story today begins. Rich men don't often engender love between themselves. Did you read this week about Frank Lowy suing his neighbour over a 9 meter veranda in Point Piper? The addition to the neighbour's home is not yet built, but was worthy of a stack of solicitors and lawyers showing up to stay the building project.

Relationships are very tender and can in their best days bring about pleasure. Without relationship, why bother? In other words, Abram and Lot should have represented family in its best moments. Abram had already left his father Terach, had just had a close encounter of the Pharaoh kind in Egypt about his wife Sarai, and today we see his nephew and he and their men having squabbles over land rights. What a bitter disappointment it is to be separated again for our father Abraham.

13:12 *Lot . . . pitched his tents near Sodom.* Since the men of Sodom were known to be wicked (v. 13), Lot was flirting with temptation by choosing to live near them. Contrast the actions of Abram (v. 18). Lot made the separation bad. He clung to the coattails of his uncle, becoming rich along with him in the process. But his religion may

not have really been his own. That is, Lot may not have really owned relationship with God. I am not sure on this one.

But I am sure that this choice of the wrong place and the earlier reading of the herdsmen fighting one another were indications of a wrong longing in Lot. He wanted heaven on earth. He wanted pleasure in things and in what others saw as customary. What a waste! He chose for himself what appeared to be the better place, the oval hillsides around the Jordan valley. This area looked like Egypt and therefore looked easy for him, his flock and their managers. Lot's heart was in the wrong place. Y'shua warned about this frequently in his sermons, saying, So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matt. 6.31-33) And again, "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful." Matt. 13:22

Lot's choice of the rich plains hearkens and reflects the choices of the Babel folks on the plains of Shinar. This is not something you want to have reflected in your life.

I want to tell two stories to illustrate separation. Please hear them both, one a story; the other an axiom. One extra biblical; the other definitively biblical. Each balances the other.

"During WWI one of my predecessors at Tenth Presbyterian Church, Donald Grey Barnhouse, led the son of a prominent American family to the Lord. He was in the service, but he showed the reality of his conversion by immediately professing Christ

before the soldiers of his military company. The war ended. The day came when he was to return to his pre-war life in the wealthy suburb of a large American city. He talked to Barnhouse about life with his family and expressed fear that he might soon slip back into his old habits. He was afraid that love for parents, brothers, sisters, and friends might turn him from following after Jesus Christ. Barnhouse told him that if he was careful to make public confession of his faith in Christ, he would not have to worry. He would not have to give improper friends up. They would give him up.

As a result of this conversation the young man agreed to tell the first ten people of his old set whom he encountered that he had become a Christian. The soldier went home. Almost immediately--in fact, while he was still on the platform of the suburban station at the end of his return trip--he met a girl whom he had known socially. She was delighted to see him and asked how he was doing. He told her, "The greatest thing that could possibly happen to me has happened." "You're engaged to be married," she exclaimed. "No," he told her. "It's even better than that. I've taken the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior." The girl's expression froze. She mumbled a few polite words and went on her way. A short time later the new Christian met a young man whom he had known before going into the service. "It's good to see you back," he declared. "We'll have some great parties now that you've returned." "I've just become a Christian," the soldier said. He was thinking, That's two! Again it was a case of a frozen smile and a quick change of conversation. After this the same circumstances were repeated with a young couple and with two more old friends. By this time word had got around, and soon some of his friends stopped seeing him. He had become peculiar, religious, and --

who knows! -- they may even have called him crazy! What had he done? Nothing but confess Christ. The same confession that had aligned him with Christ had separated him from those who did not want Jesus Christ as Savior and who, in fact, did not even want to hear about Him. J.M. Boice, *Christ's Call To Discipleship*, Moody, 1986, p. 122-23.

"We are not to be isolated but insulated," said Vance Havner, "moving in the midst of evil but untouched by it." Separation is contact with contamination. Jesus was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26), yet He was "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7:34).

I tell these stories today to you, to help us all understand that we are to be separate but part of the world. This is a hard reality which many compromise, but hopefully you will today find such a balance as will bring God pleasure.

Now for just a moment, we turn our attention to the 2<sup>nd</sup> section today, the viewing of the Land of Promise. There is a recurring theme of the threat to God's promise given in chapter 12:1-3. In nearly every episode that follows, the promise of a "numerous seed," "blessing to all peoples," or the "gift of the land" is jeopardized by the actions of some characters in the narrative. The promise looks as if it will fail. In the face of such a threat, however, God remains faithful to his word and keeps His promise. God can bring about his promise, despite human failures. So in today's story, we see the land chosen by God despite the possible changes by the not very religious Lot.

By the way, the Hebrew word "Lot" is translated "veil." So when the lot or wrapper was removed, Abram could see his way clearly and understood he was (already) in the Promised Land. Each of us needs to have our veils removed, don't we to see what God has in store for us. The apostle Paul said, "Moses, who used to put a veil over his face that the sons of Israel might not look intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. To this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. (2 Cor. 3.13-16). May God open our eyes to the wonderful things of the Lord and His grace to us in Messiah Y'shua.

God's promise of Land to Abram and then later iterated to Isaac and reiterated to Jacob means what it says. It will not always be in Jewish hands, but it will always be land leased to the Jewish people, fully owned and operated by God and in His power.

Remember God promised the land to Abram and his seed. Lot was not his seed. Taking Lot along in the journey may have been Abram's 'just in case' or his backup plan. Plan B is not in God's mind. Abram will have trouble later with Hagar and Ishmael. He already had trouble with Pharaoh. Taking Lot along may indicate more about Abram than about Lot, but we will address this in a later sermon.

When Abram was told to look northward, and eastward, etc, his viewing would have included the plains of the Jordan valley. The very section which Lot chose was included in God's promises to Abram. So even if Lot chose, he would not eventually actually own it; it would always be God's leased to Lot's uncle Abram.

Brothers and sisters, we have eternal life due to the Saviour, due to His love and forgiveness. His Resurrection has proven His covenant. His teaching is great, but it goes well beyond that to His life and death. No amount of good works will give us enough information to help us overcome evil. No amount of information will help us overcome our own evil inclination. Only the messiah can repair our relationship with God which will in turn give us pleasure with Him.

If you have never experienced this eternal and new life about which we are speaking if you are yet outside the relationship with God, then pray with me. If you