



Genesis - Chapter Thirteen

II. Genesis 11:27-50:26 - Patriarchal History (continues)

II.a Genesis 11:27-25:18 - Abraham (continues)

Summary of Chapter Thirteen

The whole community of Abraham and Lot continue to wander through the land, heading back from the Negeb towards Bethel. Their flocks and herds had become so vast that the available grazing land was insufficient for them all, causing strife between the herdsmen of the two men.

To alleviate this, Abram gives Lot the choice of where he would wish to settle with his livestock, who chose the fertile plains of the River Jordon. Abram then settled in the land of Canaan. God then instructs Abram to view all the land around him and promises to make it the possession of the great nation of which Abram would be the patriarch.

II.a.iv Genesis 13:1-18 - Abram and Lot Separate

Expelled from Egypt, Abram retraces his steps northward, through the Negeb, back to the hill country between Bethel and Ai where he had previously built an altar (12:8). Competition for pasture soon leads to strife between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot. When Abram magnanimously offers Lot first choice of the land, Lot opts for the fertile Jordan Valley; the Lord then reaffirms that Abram's descendants will possess all of Canaan.

¹ So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb.

Genesis 13:1

So Abram went up from Egypt into the Negeb. Having departed the land of Egypt at the insistence of Pharaoh, the whole entourage crossed back into the wilderness

of the Negeb, now mainly desert land for nomads but it appears to have been more fertile and suitable for livestock around four thousand years ago.

The Bible generally refers to people going up from Egypt because it generally was a land of lower elevation than much of the Promised Land, e.g. <<So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan>> (Genesis 45:25), <<Then the people answered, 'Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight>> (Joshua 24:16-17a), <<but when they came up from Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh>> (Judges 11:16).

² Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. ³ He journeyed on by stages from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, ⁴ to the place where he had made an altar at the first; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD. ⁵ Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, ⁶ so that the land could not support both of them living together; for their possessions were so great that they could not live together, ⁷ and there was strife between the herders of Abram's livestock and the herders of Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites lived in the land.

Genesis 13:2-7

These verses emphasise the wealth of both Abram and Lot, describing how the hill country east of Bethel is unable to sustain the livestock of both men. The pressure on pastureland may well have been increased by the fact that the Canaanites and the Perizzites were also dwelling in the land. There is confirmation of this in a similar statement in 12:6.

To the place where his tent had been at the beginning. Even though Abram came back from Egypt with great riches, he returned to the same place as before. He was right back where he started. Essentially, Abram's time in Egypt was wasted time, a time of testing which he had essentially failed. God could have and would have provided for his needs in Canaan. Abram should not have used the blessing God brought to him in Egypt as a justification for going there. Even though God is great enough to bring good even when one disobeys, there is still a cost built into disobedience.

To the place where he had made an altar at the first. Abram's lack of trust in God took him from his place of worship; it led him into sin, and caused him to lead others into sin. It made him more confident in his ability to lie than in the

protecting power of God. It even broke apart his family for a while. Finally, even an ungodly king rightly rebuked him. Yet, Abram also did what he should. Instead of torturing himself about his past sin, he did what he needed to do: living with the tent as a pilgrim and the altar as a worshipper, calling on the name of the Lord.

For their possessions were so great that they could not live together. God had initially called Abram to leave his family but he had taken Lot with him. Although God blessed them both with great wealth and: <<***The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it***>> (Proverbs 10:22), this very abundance became the cause of strife that would not have been the case if Abram had gone alone when called.

⁸ Then Abram said to Lot, ‘Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herders and my herders; for we are kindred. ⁹ Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.’

Genesis 13:8-9

Let there be no strife between you and me. This may simply seem to be a call for family unity but it goes deeper than that. God called Abram to the land in order to establish a nation of his own choosing that was to demonstrate to others what it meant to live for God. Quarrelling among the people of God was featured in the Scriptures: <<***The people quarrelled with Moses and said, ‘Would that we had died when our kindred died before the LORD!’***>> (Numbers 20:3), when they would do well to remember: <<***It is honourable to refrain from strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel***>> Proverbs 20:3). Such strife as this always dishonours the name of God just as similar arguments between different denominations of the church, or even within a single denomination, do today and have done throughout history. Therefore, this can be seen as a call for global church unity: <<***How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!***>> (Psalm 133:1).

Is not the whole land before you? Since Abram was the eldest, and God gave all the land to Abram and not to Lot, it seems like pure generosity on Abram’s part that caused him to make this offer to Lot. However, it also recognises that a gift of God is one to be shared not one for personal ownership. This is an attitude repeated in Scripture: <<***Abimelech said, ‘My land is before you; settle where it pleases you’***>> (Genesis 20:15), <<***You shall live with us; and the land shall be open to you; live and trade in it, and get property in it***>> (Genesis 34:10), <<***Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in***>>

the best part of the land; let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know that there are capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock’>> (Genesis 47:5-6), and: <<Now look, I have just released you today from the fetters on your hands. If you wish to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will take good care of you; but if you do not wish to come with me to Babylon, you need not come. See, the whole land is before you; go wherever you think it good and right to go>> (Jeremiah 40:4).

If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right. Abram was able to fight when the occasion demanded it. He did not yield to Lot out of weakness, but out of love and trust in God. A few acres of grazing land did not seem worth fighting for to a man with an eternal perspective.

God was glorified when Paul, out of love, waived his right to be supported by the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:14-18). God was glorified when Jesus, out of love, waived his right to an existence that knew no human suffering or trial by experience (Philippians 2:5-11). Abram fulfilled the NT principle of love: <<*Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others*>> (Philippians 2:4).

If you go to the right, then I will go to the left. Right or left, Abram knew he could trust God. He did it because he learned God would provide for his needs, and he did not have to worry about being too generous. Abram knew whatever Lot chose God would make sure Abram prospered. In Egypt, Abram thought he had to take his fate into his own hands; he had to look out for himself. Now, he was wiser and was willing to let God look out for his interests. Right or left, it did not matter to Abram, because God would be there: <<*Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you’*>> (Hebrews 13:5).

¹⁰ Lot looked about him, and saw that the plain of the Jordan was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar; this was before the LORD had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

Genesis 13:10

The plain of the Jordan was well watered everywhere. Lot’s experience with the effects of famine, probably from drought, makes his choice of the fertile Jordan Valley understandable.

Like the garden of the LORD is a reference to the Garden of Eden: <<*For the LORD will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song*>> (Isaiah 51:3), which

was also well watered (2:10). This description of the Jordan Valley predates the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, which may have adversely affected the suitability of this area for flocks and herds, for: *<<He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, a fruitful land into a salty waste, because of the wickedness of its inhabitants>>* (Psalm 107:33-34). The precise location of these cities is unknown; one possibility is the plain southeast of the Dead Sea.

¹¹ So Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastwards; thus they separated from each other. ¹² Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the Plain and moved his tent as far as Sodom. ¹³ Now the people of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD.

Genesis 13:11-13

Lot's decision to settle among the cities of the Plain brings him into the vicinity of Sodom. Lot is later found living in the city (14:12 and 19:3-11), having abandoned his tent-dwelling lifestyle. After parting company from Abram, Lot now resides close to a city whose population is described as wicked, great sinners against the LORD: *<<Then the LORD said, 'How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin!''>>* (Genesis 18:20), *<<Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgement>>* (Psalm 51:4), and: *<<This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it>>* (Ezekiel 16:49-50). This will be further confirmed in Chapters 18-19.

¹⁴ The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northwards and southwards and eastwards and westwards; ¹⁵ for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring for ever. ¹⁶ I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. ¹⁷ Rise up, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.'

Genesis 13:14-17

The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him. God wanted to talk to Abram alone after Lot left. This was a promise made to Abram, not to Abram's

nephew. This promise of the land had been made to Abram when he lived in Ur of the Chaldeans (Genesis 12:1-3 and Acts 7:2-4); God is now repeating this promise.

For all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring for ever.

Expanding on 12:7, this divine speech emphasises not only the extent of the land that Abram's descendants will inherit but also how numerous they will be. **The dust of the earth** is one of three similes used by God to illustrate the large number of offspring that Abram will have, as confirmed in 15:5 and 22:17. At this stage, Abram still has no children.

Rise up, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.

As a token of Abram's reception of the land by faith, God wants Abram to explore the land of promise, to walk through it as if it were his, although he did not have a record of ownership to the land yet. It would also be an indication to the others living in the land at the time that God keeps his promises to those he has chosen to give them to.

¹⁸ So Abram moved his tent, and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron; and there he built an altar to the LORD.

Genesis 13:18

Abram relocates to be near **Hebron**, also known as Kiriath-arba (23:2), setting up **his tent** by **the oaks of Mamre**. Since one of Abram's allies is 'Mamre the Amorite' (14:13), the oaks are probably named after him.

He built an altar to the LORD. A number of altars are constructed by the patriarchs at different locations. They are a common feature of the patriarchal period because no central sanctuary existed before the exodus from Egypt. Before the construction of the tabernacle, God was not perceived as ordinarily dwelling on the earth. These altars are places where God may be encountered in worship.

During the Middle Bronze Age, circa 2000-1500BC, when the patriarchs lived, Hebron was, for its day, a major settlement in the Judæan hills. It covered between six and seven acres, was heavily fortified, and contained some large public buildings. A cuneiform tablet discovered there from this time period indicates that Hebron was a capital city of a Canaanite kingdom.