

Introduction

We saw Abram step into a difficult season in chapter twelve. When a famine hit the Promised Land, Abram reacted in fear rather than walking in faith—he headed down to Egypt. But as we saw, leaving the place of promise always leads to spiritual compromise. He schemed, he relied on his own strength, and he got caught in a mess. Yet, through it all, God showed Himself faithful, protecting Sarai and preserving His redemptive purpose despite Abram's stumble.

Now, as we step into Genesis chapter thirteen, we see a beautiful restoration. Abram leaves Egypt behind, returns to the land of Canaan, and journeying back to Bethel, he rebuilds the altar at the place where his walk of faith first began.

As we open the Scriptures together today, three powerful themes emerge directly from this passage:

First, we will look at The Altar at Bethel and Returning to the First Love, seeing how Abram left the "school of hard knocks" in Egypt to return to the place of initial blessing—reminding us that whenever we drift or stumble, God calls us to go back to the altar of our first love and seek His face fresh.

Second, we will examine The Conflict of Prosperity and the Choice of the Flesh, observing the strife that arose between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot, contrasting Abram's selfless surrender of his rights with Lot's fleshly choice to "pitch his tent toward Sodom"—a decision based purely on worldly appearance rather than faith.

Finally, we will behold The Promise Renewed and the Walk of Faith, considering how the Lord met Abram after the separation from Lot, expanding the scope of His covenant promise and calling Abram to walk through the land in faith as a pilgrim and a worshiper.

When we let go of the world's promises and return to the altar, our heavenly Father fills that empty space with His eternal grace.

Bible Study

Look with me at Genesis chapter thirteen, starting in verse one...

Returning to the Place of Beginning

Genesis 13:1-18

"Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South." (Genesis 13:1, NKJV)

This "South" refers to the Negev, the southern desert region of Canaan. He's moving back toward the center of God's will. And notice how the Lord had looked after him:

"Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold." (Genesis 13:2, NKJV)

Even when we stumble, God is so often gracious to provide. But material wealth isn't the focus here; it's the spiritual restoration.

The Altar at Bethel

"And he went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the Lord." (Genesis 13:3-4, NKJV)

I love this. Abraham goes back to "the beginning." He goes back to Bethel—the "House of God." This was the high ground, the place where he first built an altar.

There is a powerful spiritual principle here. Sometimes in our walk with the Lord, we "go down to Egypt." We let the world entice us, or we let fear dictate our moves. When we realize we've drifted, the best thing we can do is return to the place of our first love. We need to go back to that place where we first became conscious of God's presence and power.

Think back to when you first gave your life to Jesus. Remember that excitement? That "overawed" feeling that the Creator of the universe loved you enough to send His Son to shed His blood for your sins? Sometimes our Christian walk can become "prosaical"—just going through the motions. We need to return to the altar. We need to ask the Lord to renew that fresh relationship, so we never take His grace for granted.

The Conflict of Prosperity

As they returned, a problem arose. Both Abraham and his nephew Lot had grown quite wealthy.

"Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great... And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock." (Genesis 13:6-7, NKJV)

Conflict often arises when we focus on "mine" versus "thine." But look at Abraham's heart. He doesn't pull rank. He doesn't demand his rights as the elder. He says to Lot:

"Please let there be no strife between you and me... for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left." (Genesis 13:8-9, NKJV)

The Choice of the Flesh

Now, Lot has a choice. He looks out from that high mountain ridge. To the west are the hills, but to the east is the Jordan Valley.

"And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord... Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan." (Genesis 13:10-11, NKJV)

Lot made a choice based purely on sight, not on faith. He saw the lush, tropical vegetation of the valley—it looked like the Garden of Eden or the rich lands of Egypt. It was a "fleshly" choice. He didn't ask what God wanted; he asked what looked best for his bottom line.

"Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord." (Genesis 13:12-13, NKJV)

This is the tragedy of Lot. He "pitched his tent toward Sodom." He was attracted by the world. Sin often looks attractive at first. It can be thrilling and pleasurable for a season. But as the proverb says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

It's like riding the rapids. It might be an exciting ride, but if those rapids are leading to Niagara Falls, you're heading for destruction. Lot looked at the grass, but he didn't look at the influence that wicked city would have on his soul.

The Promise Renewed

After Lot left, Abraham might have felt a bit lonely. He had raised Lot like a son. There was likely an ache in his heart as he watched his nephew ride away toward the valley. But notice that it's after the separation that God speaks to Abraham:

"And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: 'Lift your eyes now and look... for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.'" (Genesis 13:14-15, NKJV)

God tells him to look North, South, East, and West. He promises to make his descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth. Later, God would compare them to the stars in the sky. It's a beautiful reminder: when we let go of things for the sake of peace and faith, God fills that empty space with His promises.

"Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you." (Genesis 13:17, NKJV)

God tells him to "walk through it." Claim it by faith. And what does Abraham do? He moves to Hebron and builds another altar to the Lord. His life was marked by the tent (the pilgrim) and the altar (the worshiper).

Practical Application & Challenge

For the Believer: Where are you pitching your tent today? Are you "inching toward Sodom," letting the attractions of this world slowly compromise your walk? Or are you at the altar? I want to challenge you this week to return to "Bethel." Get alone with the Lord. Revisit that first love. Don't let your relationship with Jesus become a routine. Walk through the promises He has given you in His Word and claim them by faith.

For Those Who Don't Know Jesus: You might be like Lot, looking at the world and thinking it has everything you need. But the "plain of Jordan" eventually leads to Sodom, and the end of that road is empty. There is a hunger in your heart that livestock, silver, and gold can never fill.

Jesus Christ came because He loves you. He went to a cross and shed His precious blood to pay for every sin you've ever committed. He didn't stay in the grave; He rose again, proving He is the Lord of Life and the Savior of the world. He is calling you today to leave "Egypt" and come home. You don't have to clean yourself up first—just come to Him.