



## TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

### Talk Genesis 13:1-9: Abram and Lot Separate

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#### Lesson 28

In the first half of Genesis 13 we have the return of Abram from Egypt and then his separation from Lot.

*"Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South. 2 Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. 3 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, 4 to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the LORD.*

*5 Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. 6 Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. 7 And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land.*

*8 So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. 9 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." (NKJV)*

#### Background Notes

In Genesis 12 we have the call of Abram out of a life of idolatry, to become the father of the Jewish people, from whom the Messiah would eventually come. In chapter 12 we saw Abram's lapse of faith when he went down to Egypt and lied about his wife to protect his own life. But now in chapter 13, Abram is back. He is back in the land physically – and he has been restored spiritually. Look at verses 3 and 4: *"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, 4 to the place of the altar which he had made there at first."* (NKJV)

So Abraham came back to Bethel, where he had lived when he first arrived in Canaan. At Bethel he had built an altar and called on the name of the Lord (12:8). Now we see Abram again building an altar and calling on the name of the Lord. When Abram was in Egypt, we don't read of him building an altar and calling on the name of the Lord. Now we see that Abram is back in fellowship with the Lord.

But that doesn't mean there will be no problems in his life. There was strife between the herdsman of Abram's livestock and the herdsman of Lot's livestock (v7). Abram and his nephew Lot both had a lot of livestock (v6), and their possessions were so great that they couldn't dwell together. Some of this wealth was acquired when they were down in Egypt (Genesis 12).

By the way, this is the first mention of "wealth" in the Bible, and notice that it is causing strife! This accumulated wealth led to problems between Abram's "cowboys" and Lot's "cowboys." Maybe if they hadn't gone down to Egypt and acquired these additional flocks and herds, this problem of strife would not have arisen. In any case, it was not a pleasant situation, and the locals, the Canaanites and Perizzites, clearly observed this strife (v7). It was not a good testimony.

If Abram had not come up with a solution, there would have been a family feud and a full-scale range war! But Abram's solution to the problem was to separate from Lot: *"So Abram said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. 9 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'"*(v8-9).

Abram, in a truly magnanimous gesture, let Lot have the first choice of what land to choose for himself. Would you have done that? Abraham didn't have to do that, but in the interest of family peace, that's exactly what he did.

## **Doctrinal Points**

### **1. God fully restores the backslider who returns.**

Maybe you never heard the term "backslider" applied to Abraham before. When Abram went down to Egypt and lied about his wife to protect himself, and did not trust the Lord, this was a lapse of faith. Therefore Abram was a "backslider," because that is the way backsliding is defined. It is a lapse of faith on the part of the believer.

But God restores the backslider! He doesn't just partially restore the backslider -- He is willing to fully restore the backslider who returns. That's the teaching point of verses 3 and 4. Abraham was back at Bethel, which means "the house of God." He was back at Bethel, the house of God -- where he was at the beginning, before his lapse of faith. He was once again in fellowship with the Lord. He was worshiping the Lord at the altar once again. He was calling on the name of the Lord, or proclaiming the name of the Lord, once again. God had fully restored Abram.

The same can be true in your case and my case! Maybe you have suffered a lapse of faith in some area of your life. Maybe the term "backslider" can be applied to you right now. Maybe you're thinking that there's no way back to fellowship with God -- that God does not, or cannot, or will not, restore you fully. Listen, God **fully** restores the backslider who returns! Remember the story of the "Lost Son," told by our Lord? Certainly this has an application to the backslider today. When the "lost" son returned to his father, was he made a servant, or an employee, or restored to "50% sonship"? No, he was restored to the position of **full** sonship in the family -- the position that he held before he went away from the father. God fully restores the backslider who returns.

Of course, when we backslide, or lapse in faith, we lose time in Christian service. We lose effectiveness in our testimony, and we may lose out on all that God wanted to do with our lives. But that is not the point here. Here it is a matter of fellowship with the Lord in the family of God. As David said in Psalm 23:3 *"He restores my soul."* God fully restores the backslider who returns.

## 2. Sometimes the best solution to strife is separation.

Abram decided that in this situation of strife, the best solution was to separate from Lot. There was not enough land for all the flocks and herds, they were not being a good testimony to the surrounding Canaanites, the range war was escalating, and before long Abraham and Lot would be feuding. So it seemed that the best solution for the strife was separation. We see from the rest of the passage that God confirmed Abraham's solution. Lot of course made a selfish and disastrous choice to move in the direction of Sodom, but that is another matter. Regardless of the bad decision that Lot made, Abraham made the right decision to separate. Sometimes the best solution to strife is separation.

Now the question arises: When do we separate and when do we try to reconcile and stay together, as a solution to strife? We should always separate if evil and moral corruption of this world are involved. 2 Corinthians 6:17 says, "*Come out from among them and be separate,*" says the Lord. *'Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.'*" So we must always separate if evil and moral corruption of this world are involved in a situation of strife.

On the other hand, we should never use separation as a solution if the strife is training a relationship that God has said should stay together. The obvious example here would be marriage. 6 "*So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate*" (Matthew 19:6).

However, there are other situations where separation is sometimes the best solution to strife. Take family situations, for example. As here in the case of Abram and his nephew Lot, where there is strife between relatives, and the problems are getting worse, and nothing is getting resolved, sometimes the best solution to strife is to separate – not permanent separation (as in never seeing one another again!), but putting a decent distance between the family members to ease the irritations of living too close to each other.

What about a church situation or a ministry situation, where there is strife between two Christians or two groups of Christians? If the problems can be worked out, and reconciliation can be attained, that's **great!** That's what Paul exhorted the Philippians to do. But sometimes it can't be worked out, or it isn't being worked out! Sometimes the best solution is to separate, at least temporarily. It's not ideal, but sometimes it is best in that situation. Why destroy the church or ministry? Better to separate.

A good example is found in Acts 15. There was strife between Paul and Barnabas over whether they should take John Mark with them on the second missionary journey. Acts 15:39, "*The contention became so sharp that they parted from one another.*" There was probably "wrong" on both sides there in that situation, but rather than fight it out, and waste valuable time and spiritual energy, Paul and Barnabas separated. The result was that **two** missions teams went out! Barnabas and Mark went out as a missionary team, and Paul and Silas went out together on Paul's second missionary journey. This was a far better solution than for Paul and Barnabas to continue to fight it out, and no missions teams go at all! Sometimes the best solution to strife is separation.

## **Practical Application: Why not go back to square one”?**

I’m sure you have heard and understand the expression, “going back to square one.” To go back to “square one” means to start over again, or go back to the beginning. That’s what Abram did when he came back from Egypt -- he went back to square one. Abram had backslidden. He had lapsed in his faith when he went down to Egypt because of the famine, and he had lied about his wife Sarai. His increased wealth acquired in Egypt added to his problems. But Abraham realized his problem, and he went back to square one. *“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, 4 to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the LORD” (v3-4).*

He went back to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, and he went back to the place of the altar, which he had made there at first. His tent speaks of the pilgrim character of the believer. We’re only here on earth for a short sojourn – our real home is Heaven. His altar speaks of worship. Some of us need to go back to square one in our faith. We need to recapture that pilgrim character of the Christian lifestyle and become less entangled in the things of this world. We need to go to the altar. We need to go back to the place of worship.

Do you feel that there is something missing in your Christian life? Have you wandered away from the Lord, and wandered away from his Word? Why not “go back to square one”?