

Abram and Lot Separate

Genesis 13:1-9

Genesis 13:1-9 - "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."

Background Notes

In Genesis 12 God called Abram out of a life of idolatry to become the father of the Jewish people, from whom the Messiah would eventually come. Then we saw Abram's lapse of faith when he went to Egypt and lied about his wife to protect his own life. But in chapter 13 Abram was back. He was back in the Land physically, and he was back in relationship with the Lord - restored spiritually. *"And he went on his journey 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."*

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 Abram again built an altar and called on the name of the Lord. When Abram was in Egypt, there was no mention of building an altar and calling on the name of the Lord, but now Abram was back in fellowship with the Lord.

However, that didn't mean there would be no problems in his life. Abram and his nephew Lot had become wealthy. Both of them both had a lot of livestock (v6). Some of this wealth was acquired when they were down in Egypt. By the way, this is the first mention of "wealth" in the Bible, and notice that the wealth was the reason for the strife!

This accumulated wealth led to problems between Abram's "cowboys" and Lot's "cowboys" - strife between the herdsman of Abram's livestock and the herdsman of Lot's livestock. Their flocks and herds were so large that they couldn't dwell together. There was simply not enough pasture.

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. It was not a good testimony.

If Abram had not come up with a solution, the family feud could have escalated into a full-scale "range war"! But Abram's solution to the problem was that he and Lot should separate: *"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"* (v8-9).

Abram, in a truly magnanimous gesture, allowed his nephew Lot to have the first choice of the land. Would you have done that? Abraham didn't have to, but in the interest of family peace, he did exactly that.

Doctrinal Points

1. God fully restores the backslider who returns.

Have you ever heard the term "backslider" applied to Abraham? When Abram went down to Egypt and did not trust the Lord, but lied about his wife to protect himself, this was a lapse of faith. Thus Abram was a "backslider," because backsliding is a lapse of faith of a believer. But God restores backsliders! And He doesn't just partially restore backsliders - He is willing to fully restore the backslider who returns.

Abraham was back at Bethel, which means "the house of God" - where he was at the beginning, before his lapse of faith (v3-4). Once again he was in fellowship with the Lord. He was worshiping the Lord at the altar once again. And once again he was calling on the name of the Lord, or proclaiming the name of the Lord. God had fully restored Abram. This can be true in the life of anyone who has suffered a lapse of faith in some area of his or her life. Maybe you're thinking that the term "backslider" applies to you. 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. But God will fully restore a backslider who returns!

Remember the story of the "Lost Son," told by our Lord in Luke 15? This surely has an application for the backslider today. When the "lost" son returned to his father, was he made a servant, or an employee, or a "50% son"? No! He was restored to his position of being a full son in the family - restored to 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 suffer a lapse in our faith, we lose time in Christian service. We lose effectiveness in our testimony. We may even lose out on all that God wanted to do with our lives. But that is not the point here. Our point is that fellowship with the Lord in the family of God can be fully restored when we return! In Psalm 23:3 David said, "He restores my soul." God fully restores the backslider who returns.

2. Sometimes the best solution to strife is separation.

Abram decided that the best solution for this situation of strife 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; a range war was escalating; before long Abraham and Lot would be feuding. So it seemed that the best solution for the strife was separation.

From the rest of the chapter we'll see that God confirmed Abraham's solution. Unfortunately Lot made a selfish and disastrous choice to move towards the sinful city of Sodom, but that is another matter. Regardless of Lot's bad decision, Abraham made the right decision to separate. Sometimes the best solution to strife is separation.

Now the question arises: As a solution to strife today, when do we separate, and when do we try to reconcile and stay together? 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 should separate if evil and moral corruption are involved in a situation of strife.

On the other hand, we should not separate as a solution to strife in a relationship that God has said should stay together. The obvious example here is marriage. "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 in which separation may be the best solution to strife. 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 by putting a decent distance between the family members to ease the irritations of living too close to each other.

What about when there is strife between two Christians, or two groups of Christians, or a church situation, or a ministry situation? 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 a situation can't be worked out, or it isn't being worked out! Sometimes the best solution is to separate, at least temporarily, and perhaps develop "sister churches." It may not be ideal, but sometimes it is best. Why destroy a church or ministry? Better to separate.

Acts 15 is a good example. Paul and Barnabas disagreed over whether John Mark should go with them on the second missionary journey. There may have been “wrong” on both sides, because their argument became “sharp.” But rather than fighting it out and wasting valuable time and spiritual energy, Paul and Barnabas separated. The result was that two missions teams went out! Barnabas and Mark became a team, and Paul and Silas went out together on another team. This was a far better solution than if Paul and Barnabas had continued to argue - and no missions teams had gone out at all! Sometimes the best solution to strife is separation.

Practical Application

Why not go back to Square One?

You've heard the expression, “going back to Square One.” It means to start over again, or go back to the beginning. When Abram 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, and he had lied about his wife Sarai. His increased wealth acquired in Egypt added to his problems. But when Abraham realized his problem, he went back to Square One. He went back to the place where he had pitched his tent at the beginning. He went back to the place where he had first built an altar.

Spiritually speaking, Abram's tent speaks of the fact that as believers, we are *pilgrims*. We're only here on earth for a short sojourn. Our real home is Heaven. To the believer, Abram's altar speaks to us 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 possessions and pleasures of this world. And 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”?