

LESSON 1
September 1, 2024

Unit I: Leaders Set Worship Example Marking Transitions

DEVOTIONAL READING: Philippians 4:10-19

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Genesis 12-13

PRINT PASSAGE: Genesis 13:8-18

KEY VERSE

Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD. (Genesis 13:18, KJV)

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Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD. (Genesis 13:18, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Explain the context of Abraham's worship regarding altars.
- Desire the spiritual maturity that develops through acknowledging God's activity in our lives.
- Practice a worshipful response in recognition of God's presence and activity in the threshold moments in your life.

*Key Terms

Altar (verse 18)—Hebrew: *mizbēach* (miz-bay'-akh): "to slaughter"; a place made for sacrifices to the Lord.

Herdmen (verse 8)—Hebrew: *ra'ah* (raw-aw'): herdsmen; keepers of a herd, especially cattle or sheep. Herdsmen's responsibilities in tending flocks were (1) to guide them to fertile areas, (2) to make sure the flocks could get to water, and (3) to protect them from wild beasts and robbers; "herders" (NIV).

Seed (verse 15)—Hebrew: *zera* (zeh'-rah): descendant; posterity; children; "offspring" (NIV).

Strife (verse 8)—Hebrew: *meribah* (mer-ee-baw'): contention; provocation; "quarreling" (NIV).

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

This week's lesson explores the complex character of Abram, the father of faith. When Abram moved to Egypt to escape a famine, he asked his wife to pretend to be his sister to protect himself



The Biblical Context

Our lesson's background text is Genesis 12 and 13. In these chapters, God instructed Abram, who later became known as Abraham, to leave his homeland and journey to the land of Canaan. This event marks the beginning of patriarchal history in Genesis, focusing on Israel's earliest ancestors. Abram obeyed God's command and set out for Canaan. Along the way, he faced challenges, including a famine that led him to Egypt. To protect himself, Abram told a half-truth about his wife, Sarai, claiming that she was his sister. After returning to the land between Bethel and Ai from Egypt, both wealthy and blessed, Abram and Lot found themselves in the same region. Their herds and flocks grew, leading to disputes among their herdsmen. To prevent further conflict, Abram proposed separation. He generously allowed Lot to choose the land he desired—and Lot selected the fertile Jordan River Valley, while Abram settled in Canaan. Despite parting ways, Abram remained faithful to God's promise, and the Lord reaffirmed His covenant with him. The lesson to glean from Genesis 13 centers on showing wise decision making, generosity, and faithfulness in conflict.

from the Egyptians. The Egyptians recognized Sarai's beauty, and Abram received gifts of livestock and servants in exchange for her hand in marriage. God sent a plague, and Abram had to leave Egypt with Sarai and all his acquired possessions. Later, when he returned to the land between Bethel and Ai, he built an altar to worship God, which some scholars believe was his way of acknowledging his failed faith.

The story of Rosaria Butterfield, a former atheist, is an inspiring example of the power of faith. Despite losing everything that mattered, she remained steadfast in her faith. Before becoming a Christian, Rosaria was an English professor at a small liberal arts college. One day, a pastor responded to her criticism of a local Christian gathering kindly and thoughtfully, offering her an invitation to contact him. As Rosaria interacted with the humble pastor and his wife and studied the Bible, she realized God was real and worth believing in. Rosaria's testimony teaches us that repentance requires greater intimacy with God than our sin. Repentance is an intimate affair, and the reward for our courage is immeasurable. Let us follow in the footsteps of Abram and Rosaria and embrace the power of faith in our lives.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

A Prudent Proposal (*Genesis 13:8-9*)

KJV

8 And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.

9 Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

NIV

8 So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives.

9 "Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

There was a conflict between the herders of Abram and Lot due to insufficient pasture (see Genesis 13:5-7). The available free land was minimal, as the city-states controlled a certain territory, and

neutral land was limited. The land couldn't bear them, and there wasn't enough pasture to continue grazing, leading to the conflict between the two groups of herders. The Canaanites and the Perizzites lived there, which was the primary reason for the crowded conditions. The conflict wasn't personal between Abram and Lot but between the two groups of herders looking for their lords' welfare. Abram appealed to his nephew Lot—his relative—using the term “brother” to emphasize the importance of maintaining peaceful relations in a hostile environment (**verse 8**). Later, when Lot was taken captive by eastern kings, Abram came to his rescue, once again referring to Lot as his “brother” (see Genesis 14:14, 16). In **verse 9**, Abram's question “Is not the whole land before you?” may seem disingenuous, since the Canaanites largely occupied the land. However, Abram expressed his confidence in the Lord's promise of possession and spoke proleptically, as if the land were already his to distribute. When Lot had to choose between two directions, Abram kindly let him have the first option, affirming his faith and generosity (**verse 9**; see Genesis 24). The terms “left and right” in this context indicate a decision to be made, with the orientation being toward the east and north (“left”) and the south (“right”). Abram's willingness to accept whatever Lot did not choose inspires us to let go of our attachments and embrace a spirit of kindness and understanding—while his peaceful resolution with his nephew demonstrates the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships even in difficult circumstances.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How can we learn from Abram's willingness to yield and prioritize family harmony over personal gain?

Unwise Choice (*Genesis 13:10-13*)

KJV

10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

11 Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

12 Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

13 But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.

NIV

10 Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)

11 So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company:

12 Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.

13 Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.

When Lot looked around, he saw that the Plain of Jordan was well-watered and looked like the Garden of Eden and the land of Egypt (**verses 10-12**). Lot chose to settle in this land without considering Abram's needs. On the other hand, Abram let Lot make the first choice. After Lot had chosen, he journeyed east, separated from Abram, and settled in the cities of the Plain, with his tent pitched near Sodom. **Verse 13** gives the divine estimation of Sodom: "Now the men of Sodom were wicked." The Hebrew word for "wicked" describes external wickedness. It goes on to state that they were sinners against Jehovah exceedingly. The Hebrew word means "very sinners." Moreover, they were "very sinners" against the Lord, meaning God was offended. At this point, there is no indication in the text that Lot was aware of this. There is also a parallel here with Noah's account. In both cases, there is a concern of extreme wickedness (see Genesis 6:5; 8:21), and this corruption had to be wiped out (see Genesis 6:12-13; 19:13). Lot's move to Sodom set the stage for the events of chapters 14 and 18-19. Lot's transition and involvement with Sodom comprised five steps. First, he noticed the prosperous land of Sodom from afar (**verse 10**). Second, he chose to settle near Sodom (**verse 11**). Third, he pitched his tent close to Sodom (**verse 12**), still living the life of a nomad, much like Abram had done previously outside Shechem and Bethel. Fourth, he settled in Sodom (see Genesis 14:11-12; 2 Peter 2:7-8). Finally, he sat at the Gate of Sodom, indicating that he had become a citizen of the city and an elder of the community (see Genesis 19:1).

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Lot made decisions based solely on material gain without considering the spiritual implications. Has that ever been the case in your life?

Kept Promises (*Genesis 13:14-18*)

KJV

14 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

18 Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.

NIV

14 The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west.

15 "All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.

16 "I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.

17 "Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."

18 So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD.

In **verses 14-15**, God promised Abram the land and instructed him to look at it in all four directions. God used “na” to emphasize that the promise was beyond human understanding. God would give to Abram and his descendants all the land that he saw, including the area Lot chose. God extended the promise to Abram individually, not just to his descendants. The promise would be given to the Jewish people forever during the Messianic Age. In **verses 16-17**, God promised Abram that his descendants would become innumerable and instructed him to walk through the length and breadth of the land to prophesy his physical possession. The promise was that Abram would also possess the land, not just his descendants. The amillennial view of the end times reduces the land promise to a mere symbol of heaven, rendering such Scriptures as **verse 17** meaningless. Abram was promised a physical inheritance on the earth and a spiritual one in heaven. Abram lived a nomadic lifestyle despite being promised ownership of the land. He settled near the pagan worship site of Mamre, where he built an altar to the Lord (**verse 18**). This place was close to the city of Hebron, originally known as *Kiryat Arba* before Abram changed its name to Hebron. The nearby field and cave of Machpelah became the burial place of the patriarchs. By walking through the land and building altars in pagan places, Abram prophetically took spiritual possession of it.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Why did Abram build altars to worship the Lord? How can we create spiritual markers to remember God’s faithfulness?

A Closing Thought

Abram had already received God’s promise that his descendants would inherit the land. Despite the conflict, he trusted in God’s provision and promises. God renewed His promise to Abram after Lot’s departure. He assured Abram of the land and countless offspring. Abram’s immediate response was to relocate his tent to the Oaks of Mamre at Hebron and build another altar to the Lord. This act of worship reflected Abram’s faith in God’s faithfulness and provision. Altars symbolized devotion, gratitude, and acknowledgment of God’s presence. Abram’s consistent worship reflected his unwavering faith and obedience.

Your Life

In a world that values material gain and personal achievements, Abram’s story reminds us of the importance of nurturing healthy relationships. Choosing peace over pride is often more valuable than any earthly possession. Trust in God’s promises and express gratitude through acts of worship. Abram’s story inspires us to honor and worship God by living in faith, resolving conflicts, and acknowledging His faithfulness.

Your World!

Conflict is inevitable in human interactions. Abram’s approach to resolving the conflict with Lot’s herdsmen teaches us valuable lessons. Learn to seek peaceful solutions, listen actively, and find common ground. Applying these principles can lead to healthier relationships, whether it’s a disagreement at work, within our families, or in our communities.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, may we be a people who walk by faith and not by sight. Strengthen our resolve to follow You even when faced with challenges and conflicts. Let our lives reflect the unwavering trust that Abraham had in You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

As you prepare for next week's lesson, consider your response to this question: "What role should intercessory prayer play in the life of a believer?" Read 1 Kings 8:22-24, 37-39, 46, 48-50a.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, September 2	"Sighs Too Deep for Words"	(Romans 8:18-28)
TUESDAY, September 3	"God Hears Our Cry for Help"	(Psalm 34:11-22)
WEDNESDAY, September 4	"Celebrate with Rejoicing, Thanksgiving, Singing"	(Nehemiah 12:27-30, 44-47)
THURSDAY, September 5	"Bring Your Requests before God"	(2 Chronicles 7:12-22)
FRIDAY, September 6	"Lord, Teach Us to Pray"	(Luke 11:1-13)
SATURDAY, September 7	"God, the Promise Keeper"	(1 Kings 8:22-24, 27-30, 37-43)
SUNDAY, September 8	"Hear Our Plea and Grant Compassion"	(1 Kings 8:44-53)

Notes
