

“Consequences of Choices” (Genesis 13:1-18)

Although in chapter twelve we noted a failure in Abraham’s faith, in this chapter we must see a triumph of his faith in verses 8 through 13. It is encouraging in this chapter to see a change in Abraham. He no longer acts in self-will. It is interesting to note his attitude changes after he has worshipped once again at Bethel. The separation from Lot delineated the growth in Abraham’s faith from his failures in Egypt. We now see a man of faith trusting simply on God’s sovereign promises to be his Jehovah Jireh. Abraham is advancing in faith and learning from the failure of the recent past. Sadly, Lot does not appear to learn anything worthwhile.

And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD. (v1-4)

Abraham left Egypt humiliated and chastened. He had learned the consequences of doubting God and trusting in self. Abraham had materially prospered in his sojourning there, as he was now, “*was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.*” This proves that material blessing, even for believers, does not indicate spiritual blessing. However, this wealth will not bring happiness to this family. It will bring a permanent and painful division with Lot. God overrules and ultimately achieves His divine purposes but Abraham will pay a heavy price for disobedience.

Abraham retraces his steps back to where he started at Bethel, “*unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning.*” It is not without significance that he returns to the place where he first built an altar to the Lord. There is no record of him worshipping in Egypt; no fellowship with God there, and no new promises given in his time there. It is, therefore, no surprise that when he is in the place where God commanded him to be that we find him again calling or declaring his faith in Jehovah. He could hardly do so in his backslidden condition in Egypt! Abraham’s sojourn in Egypt reflects much lost time until he repented and did the “*first works.*” The wonderful thing is that even though he had failed God, the Lord had not cast him away.

And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram’s cattle and the herdmen of Lot’s cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. (v5-7)

The rapid increase in prosperity for Abraham and Lot brought complications. The wealth of Egypt was the immediate root of his next troubles with Lot and a painful separation from the nephew he truly loved and may have regarded as his heir. There is something about that visit to Egypt, which reflects the spirit of Lot’s subsequent conduct and life. Another consequence of his sojourn in Egypt may have been his picking up of Hagar as an handmaid and the devastating consequences their relationship would have for the people of God. Providence took both of these hindrances and in the end God overruled both for His own glory.

We are told that, “*the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land,*” so it was likely difficult to get adequate grazing land for their flocks and herds. This was now compounded by the fact that their animal holdings had expanded. This did not bring harmony, but strife for, “*there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram’s cattle and the herdmen of Lot’s cattle.*” A range war broke

out amongst the servants. Interestingly, Abraham did not want to separate from Lot as God originally commanded him. So God finds another way to overrule Abraham's act of disobedience. Deffingbaugh notes,

“My friend, one way or the other God's will is going to be done. It could have been done by Abram in Ur, but it was not. God providentially brought an irritation and competition between Abram and Lot which forced a separation to occur. Sooner or later, God's purposes will come to pass. If we do not see the need for obedience, God will create one. You can count on it.”

It should be also noted that there was no problems over finances when they were both poorer. We sometimes think that wealth is a desired blessing but wealth can be a dangerous blessing! Money has destroyed close friendships. It has divided marriages, homes, and churches. The Lord Jesus warned of one danger of wealth,

How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (Luke 18:24-25)

The Apostle Paul added this warning,

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Tim. 6:9-10)

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. 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. (v8-9)

Abraham recognises there is a problem and does not ignore it. He was first to note that what had begun with the servants would probably end with the masters. This would result in divisions that the surrounding Canaanites could take ruthless advantage over. Abraham also discerns that this is not good for their testimony, “for we be brethren.” Many divisions by believers over finances could be solved if all parties remembered those same four words.

Abraham, being wiser than Lot, nips the problem in the bud. He takes the lead to come to a critical decision. As the leader and elder, Abraham showed a truly magnanimous spirit, as he had the undoubted right to the first choice. He was the one to whom God had promised to give the land (cf. Gen. 12:7). Abraham was Lot's superior in every way but acted like Christ in giving up his rights for others (cf. Philp. 2:4-8; Rom. 12:10). Although he had temporarily slipped in Egypt, he looks a giant of the faith now. Abraham waived his right in the interests of reconciliation and generously stated, “*Is not the whole land before thee*” (v9). His solution could not have been more gracious or godly. Kidner notes,

“Abram’s handling of this conflict is a model of insight, good sense and generosity. His reminder we are brethren singled out the aspect that mattered most in the face of an alien world. And his proposal was selfless as it was practical, and it resolved the immediate tension without creating any future ones.”

The carnal mind would have regarded Abraham’s action as foolhardy. But Abraham was a man who had learned to get ahead God’s way – not by seeking his own best interests at the expense of others, but by putting the interests of others ahead of his own. He was happy for the leftovers with God, as he knew, “little is much when God is in it.” That is the spirit of meekness, as Abraham believed that a sovereign God would take care of him no matter what part of Canaan he lived in.

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. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly. (v10-13)

All of us will face critical choices in our lives as pilgrims. It is vital that we face those in a biblical and not in a worldly manner. Sadly Lot did the latter and made the worst decision of his life. There is no hint that he prayed over his decision. We get a clear insight into his shallow motivation for his choice to go as we are told that he saw the valley “like the land of Egypt.” The eyes now saw what the heart longed for. Egypt is where Lot’s heart was fixed, as it was there that he became rich. He remembered that it was a place where one could get wealthy quick so he measured every choice by what he experienced there. Deep down Lot yearned for the good life of Egypt but not the hard life of a faithful pilgrim. Lot saw nothing but material gain in that place. It would be Egypt revisited! He carefully counted the material cost but not the spiritual cost. Lot was possessed by possessions.

Lot likely saw Abraham’s act of meekness as a weakness. He was determined not to make the same “mistake.” Abraham trusted God, Lot trusted his economic senses. He was determined to do the very best for Lot. Material advancement was the bottom line for him, as he deliberately “chose him all the plain of Jordan.” The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life determined his choice. This initial small step of compromise soon led to getting close to the nearest place to hell on earth, Sodom. We read, “Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.” Tragically, the next time we find Lot in the inspired record, he is no longer nearby the wicked inhabitants of Sodom—he is living among them and on his way to becoming one of their leading citizens.

Lot lived by sight and not by faith. He never gave any thought as to any spiritual consequences for his family such as what the Holy Spirit records, “But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.” Either he was ignorant of the sin of Sodom or frankly he just wasn’t bothered. The land was good, but the men were bad. Lot’s carnal decision will be very costly in the long run. It will nearly cost him his life and will ultimately cost him his testimony, family, and the wealth he so much craved. His story is a monumental tragedy. Many have repeated his mistake.

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: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. 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. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. 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. (v14-18)

Doubtless, the devil whispered in Abraham's ear that he had made a foolish choice and that all his family would suffer for his weakness. However, this act of faith and separation by Abraham led to God reaffirming His covenant with Abraham that he would be greatly blessed. God did not allow His faithful child to lose by his magnanimous offer to Lot and specifically assures Abraham that this whole land – on which both he and Lot are dwelling as sojourners.

It is surely without coincidence that God blesses Abraham after he finally separates from Lot, “*For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever*” (v15). The fullness of God's blessing could not come apart from full obedience to God's revealed will. The Lord had promised to “*shew*” Abram the land (Gen. 12:1) initially and then when he entered to “*give*” the land unto his “*seed*” (v7). It is also only at this final point of separation from all of his family that God urges Abram to step out in faith and appropriate this gift as if he already had the title deeds in v17 by “*Arise, walk through the land in the length of it, and in the breadth of it.*”

In response to this covenantal revelation, Abraham then moves his tents to Hebron and there he built yet another altar to the Lord in worship, as he walks on with God. It is interesting to note this epoch in the life of Abraham. He begins this chapter with returning to the will of God and worship, then there is a test, a triumph, and then it closes with him in the will of God and at worship again.

From the world's perspective, it appears that Lot got the best of the deal. He will soon trade his tent for a townhouse in Sodom. Over time Lot acquired such a reputation that he was appointed a city ruler. But he has no testimony there. We don't read of him ever building an altar to worship the Lord there. Lot just lived like everyone else. He chose the immediate over the eternal. Lot is living for Lot, but Abraham is living for the Lord. The story of Lot is an inspired example of how easily the world is able to influence a righteous mind and the devastating consequences.

By contrast to Lot, Abraham was content to live by faith as a pilgrim with a tent and an altar. He had renounced this world for the next so Sodom held no attraction for him. That is why his name became great for his faith whereas Lot's name is infamous for failure. Ironically, the things Lot desired and obtained never brought him the permanent happiness he expected. He will live in a daily state of vexation of the wickedness of Sodom. Abraham was content with his portion and another irony was that in the final analysis, God gave all the land to Abraham's descendants. It is always best to do God's will and leave the consequences to Him. Maclaren observes, “In the end, he who sought this world lost it, and he who was willing to give up anything for the honour of God found it.”

APPLICATION

All too often we hear believers express regret for foolish choices they have made in the past, which have had devastating consequences. Lot made a terrible choice, yet a choice that many

believers make today. In Matthew 6:33 the Lord Jesus Christ gave us the divine formula how to make the most of our lives when He instructed, “*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*” To seek the kingdom of God is to seek the rule and the reign of God over your entire life. It is to seek the King of that Kingdom. So our lifelong pursuit is not for material things but the presence, pleasure and Person of our King, Jesus Christ.

The problem in this area of our lives is not that we don’t understand what the Bible says. Our problem is that we do and just don’t want to do it! Frankly, so many of us are satisfied with a mediocre and stunted Christian life and we don’t seek God. Too many just seek personal happiness and hope to have God thrown in as a bonus. People, possessions, power, prestige, pleasure, and other desires compete for our priority. Often they win our affections over God.

By our actions, many of us imply that we believe Jesus Christ is wrong in Matthew 6:33. Yet we claim to be His disciples and we claim that we believe every Word of Scripture is infallible and inerrant! However, to be consistent, we should remove passages like Matthew 6:33 from our Bibles or change it to, “but seek ye second or third the kingdom of God.....” We sing hymns like,

*Nothing between my soul and the Saviour,
So that His blessed face may be seen;
Nothing preventing the least of His favour,
Keep the way clear! Let nothing between.*

Yet, so many go out and elevate all kinds of things over Him. It is exactly this attitude that cuts off the blessing of God. How it must grieve the heart of our Blessed Master to see us so indifferent or regard Him as merely incidental to our wellbeing. However, anything that distracts us from Christ as the preeminent One must go. He alone must be the supreme focus of our lives. For if we truly put the Lord first, nothing else will be out of order!

The choices we make determine the path we travel. Abraham and Lot exemplify that very clearly. Sodom looks an attractive choice today, but remember tomorrow it will be destroyed by fire. Boice says it well,

You may think that you are different from Lot. But if you have put your job ahead of your family’s spiritual life, if you have put your social advancement ahead of a proper association with God’s people, if you have let your choice of a home keep you from a church in which you can grow in faith and worship - you have moved from the highlands to the plain of the Jordan.

You’re either being faithful or you’re not. There are 168 hours in a week. What are you doing with yours? Are you a God-seeking person? Does He have priority in your life? What evidence in your life points in this direction? If there is not, then rearrange your priorities and put first His kingdom and His righteousness.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. When is it right to fight for your rights, and when is it right to give in?
2. Why do we struggle to take a lesser place?
3. What is meekness? Why is it different from weakness?
4. What are the differences between Abraham and Lot in this chapter? Do we find more like Abraham or Lot today in the church?
5. What other choices are we called to make as Christians that don't make sense from the world's perspective?
6. How have you been challenged by this passage?