

Genesis Chapter 13 – Don't trust in appearances, hold on to promises.

Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South.

<sup>2</sup> Abram *was* very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. <sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the LORD. <sup>5</sup> Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> *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." <sup>10</sup> 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, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. <sup>11</sup> Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> But the men of Sodom *were* exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD. <sup>14</sup> And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; <sup>15</sup> for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. <sup>16</sup> And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, *then* your descendants also could be numbered. <sup>17</sup> Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you." <sup>18</sup> Then Abram moved *his* tent, and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which *are* in Hebron, and built an altar there to the LORD.

### Introduction

You will remember that last week we studied Genesis chapter 12. We discovered that the call of God to Abram was about 4 promises. God promised People, He would make a great nation through Abram.

God promised a Place, He told Abram that he would have a new home, at the time of the promise Abram didn't know where that place was going to be. However later it was revealed to be the land of Canaan. God also promised Abram Protection. God promised that those people who supported Abram would be blessed and those people who opposed Abram would be cursed. Finally God revealed that He had a Programme. Abram was going to be a channel through which God would bring blessing to the whole world.

We also noted that Abram's call couldn't be explained historically or personally. It could only be explained through the "GRACE" of God. God's call to Abram was successful in the fact that he believed in faith what God had said to him. Although God's promise to Abram seemed impossible because his wife Sarai was barren and could not have any children, and also the land was occupied by very evil people, nevertheless, the person who made the promise was well able to fulfill that promise.

We also discovered in chapter 12 that Abram had a crisis of faith. There was a famine in the land and he went down to Egypt to find food for himself and his family. His crisis of faith led him to lie about his wife Sarai. He feared that if the rulers of Egypt discovered that the beautiful lady with him was his wife, then they might kill him and take his wife. Abram's thinking was wrong because it was influenced by Satan and not by God's word.

Initially things seemed to work out for Abram. He was blessed with lots of animals and servants and all he needed. However God did not approve of his lie and brought a great plague in Pharaoh's household.

Eventually Pharaoh got to find out that the pretty lady was not his sister but it was Abram's wife. Pharaoh sent Abram and all his family with Sarai out of Egypt with all their possessions.

Abram sinned, but God's sovereignty overruled, and God's plan to fulfill his promise to Abram was still valid. It had not been destroyed.

We now come to Genesis chapter 13 to discover the follow up to Abram's bad decision.

Chapter 13 can be divided up into 4 sections.

1. Abram's Repentance – v. 1-4.

Abram was deported from Egypt because he lied about his wife being his sister. He could have had a much worse punishment than that. However the head of Egypt discerned that there was somebody much more powerful than the gods of Egypt working on behalf of Abram.

Abram left Egypt with lots of physical wealth, but with very little spiritual health at all.

Abram had to face up to his failure. He failed because he trusted in his own plans, rather than God's plans and the promise of God's word.

It was a long journey back to the place that he had first built an altar to God and called upon His name. It was the place where he first worshipped God.

As Abram went on the journey he had no doubt about all that had happened in Egypt and about all the promises that God had made to him concerning the blessing of a great nation, a place for that nation to live in, protection for those people and a promise to bless the world, through Abram's seed.

No doubt Abram would have recognized that God had saved him in Egypt by bringing great plagues on Pharaoh's household.

Q. What was Abram's response to all this "GRACE" that God was pouring into his life?

The text tells us that Abram went back to the place where he had first built an "Altar" and there he "called on the name of the Lord".

We have discovered that "calling on the name of the Lord" is worshipping God, and the "altar" was the place where animals were sacrificed to make atonement for sin.

Abram had sinned against God, by lying about his wife. He now had to put that matter right with God, by sacrificing an animal on the altar.

Instead of Abram dying for his sin, the animal took his place, as a substitute. The animal died in his place.

Before we are critical of Abram for his sin we need to realize that before a Holy God, we sometimes sin. We are guilty too for breaking God's commandments. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. We deserve God's punishment.

However there is a place that we can come in repentance to God and ask for forgiveness of our sins. The place is called "The Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ".

God can forgive our sin, based upon what Jesus achieved by dying on a cross 2,000 years ago.

The life of Jesus was a substitute sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

(John 3; v. 16)

<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

It is place where we need to come often, because sometimes we sin and make mistakes in our life.

Jesus is able to forgive us and cleanse us so that we can start again and continue to follow Him.

#### Story about Forgiveness. (Illustration)

There was a young very educated man in England who sinned against his Mother and left home. He went to hide himself in a nearby city and got a job with Macdonalds. After a while he realized his mistake. He wanted to say sorry to his Mother and ask for her forgiveness.

He wasn't sure if his Mother would ever forgive him. He decided to write her letter.

He said in the letter, "Mum please forgive me for my mistake, I would like to come home and start gain afresh. If you can find a place in your heart, please tie a large white towel on the tree at the bottom of the garden. When I go past our house on the train, I can see our garden.

If I see the white towel, I will know that you have forgiven me, then I will get off the train and come home. If I do not see the white towel, I will stay on the train and not come home."

On the day he had arranged this, the train slowed down past his house as it was coming into the railway station. He looked out of the window, hoping to see a white towel tied to the tree in his garden. However what he saw was an amazing sight.

The tree was covered in white towels. The grass was covered in white sheets, and you could see any grass on the ground. Also all his old white school shirts were hanging on the washing line. The whole garden was completely white.

As the young man pondered the sight, tears streamed down his face.

Not only had his Mother forgiven him, but she showed him, that he was truly loved in an amazing way.

The same can be true for us in our relationship with God, through Jesus.

We need to realize that all our disobedience is against God. He created us and desires a personal relationship with us. Often our mistakes stand in the way of having true fellowship with God our heavenly Father.

Don't be afraid to come to Jesus and say sorry to Him and ask for His forgiveness.

He will forgive you, based upon His death for your sins and mistakes.

"Hallelujah what a Savior."

## 2. Abram's humility v. 5-9.

We are told that Abram and his relative Lot had great possessions and found that living together was not working out. On top of this problem, the servants looking after the livestock were having problems too. There was an argument over land use rights which was causing great contention.

They say that where you have people, you will always have problems. This is true. It was no different in the times of Abram as it is today. However what is encouraging to note in this section is the way that Abram dealt with the people problems.

In v. 8 we are told that Abram did not want any family dispute or problems with their herdsmen. He wanted to avoid a falling out because he said that “we are brethren”.

We know from Gen.11: v. 27 that Lot was Abram’s nephew. They were related to each other.

In v. 9 we are told that Abram offered Lot first choice of any part of the land.

This was surprising because the culture of that day would make Abram very much the senior person in the family. He would have been the head of the family.

In order to avoid a big problem Abram humbled himself and gave Lot the first choice of any part of the land.

Abram said, if you take the left part of the land, then I will take the right part of the land. However if you choose the right part of the land, then I will take the left part of the land.

This was a very humble thing to do on the part of Abram.

Abram’s mind set had obviously changed since Egypt. He was now trusting in God’s sovereignty to over- rule in the situation concerning where Abram lived.

Abram knew that God had promised him the land of Canaan for him and his descendants and he was happy to let God be in control of the situation.

Psalm 25: v. 9 says “The humble He guides in justice and the humble He teaches His way”

God was clearly guiding and teaching Abram as he humbled himself in this situation.

Although Christian leaders are responsible for leading and guiding God’s people, and they should always take a stand against false teaching and seek to correct believers who disobey God, there are times that in order to protect the unity of the brethren, the leader must do the humble thing and trust God to sovereignly direct the problem person in another direction.

Great discernment is needed in conflict situations in order to protect the Christian witness within a Church Community.

Abram had that discernment and through giving Lot the choice of land, he diffused the problem of strife and maintained his family unit.

#### Example.

The Bible has lots of characters who did not take the humble attitude and step down. As a result conflict continued for a long time.

We have the example of King Saul. Through disobeying God’s clear instructions, he was rejected as the King of Israel. However he could not accept God’s choice of David, God’s appointed King. Instead he chased David for many years in order to kill him, but in the end he killed himself. However many people were killed as a result of his choice not to take the humble approach.

Humility is always hard for a leader, but in the right situation, God will honor that act and bless the person involved.

There are a number of promises in the New Testament concerning humility.

1. God gives GRACE to the humble – 1 Peter 5: v. 5, James 4: v.6.
2. In due time God exalts the humble. – 1 Peter 5: v. 6

The great example of humility was Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:v. 5-11. (N.K.J.)

<sup>5</sup> Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, <sup>7</sup> but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus humbled Himself, but God exalted Him.

3. Lot's decision – seeing with the eyes of the flesh. – v. 10-13.

In v. 10-13 we have an account of where Lot decided to go with his family and possessions and why he made a decision to go to that place.

In v. 10 we are told that Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan and that it was well watered everywhere, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt.

Lot chose the best of the land. He could see great agriculture and cattle grazing.

Lot was only looking with human eyes. He was only concerned with the things of the flesh.

We are told that Lot pitched his tent as far as Sodom. In v. 13 we are told that the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord.

Lot may have chosen the best land on a human level, but on a spiritual level he was leaving himself open to temptation and attack from the people of Sodom. We are not sure if Lot could see the danger of living so close to Sodom in this land, or he just ignored it because the benefits of the land were more important to him. However what we do know is that he didn't consult God about where to move to. God let him make his own choices, and we will see later how unwise that was for Lot and his family.

It is very important that we stop here and make an important spiritual application.

Every day we are faced with making choices. Sometimes these choices concern small matters and sometimes they concern large matters that affect the direction of our lives. Most of the time we have absolutely no idea how things will work out for us and our families.

Therefore it is so essential that we bring all of our choices before the throne of "Grace" and ask for God's help in making wise choices. Many Christians make choices before consulting God, and then ask for God's blessing on the choices that they have made.

This is the wrong way of doing things. We first must consult God, and hear from him, wait for Him to guide us in our choices. We sometimes need to wait a long time before we hear from God. However when He does speak and guide us by opening doors of opportunity, we need to go forward in faith.

God is the only one who knows the future, because he is in the future, and because He knows what is best for us, even when we don't know.

God loves us. God knows us, God cares for us, and God will give the very best to those that leave the choice to Him.

The advice that I can give you about making wise decisions is to read the Bible. The Bible opens blind eyes, so that we can see what God can see, and base our decisions on His advice.

The Bible is written so that in all ages, through all cultures, God can guide us in all things.

The reason is, that the Bible is a “Spiritual Book” and we learn from it through our spiritual eyes. God speaks through His word. We need to make sure that we are listening and apply His truth to our lives.

#### 4. God’s encouragement to Abram – v. 14-18.

In v. 10 we are told that Lot lifted up his eyes, and saw with the eyes of the flesh. Now we are told in v. 14 that God said to Abram, “Lift up your eyes...” However this time, it was not human eyes, like Lot, but God was asking Abram to look with spiritual eyes.

God was asking Abram see something that could not be seen with the human eye. It had to be seen through the eyes of “Faith”. God was making the promises here and He had both the power and ability to perform what was needed to fulfill those promises.

God encouraged Abram about the land. Also God encouraged Abram about the number of his descendants. There were going to be so many it would be almost impossible to count them.

The big thing about this promise that needs to concern us today is that it was in the future, and even when Abram dies, although he still believed God’s promise about the people and the land, it hadn’t actually happened yet.

Turn with me to Hebrews 11: v. 8- 13 (N.K.J.)

<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; <sup>10</sup> for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God. <sup>11</sup> By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born *as many* as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

Verse 13 is the key here and it applies to today.

Why does it apply to us today?

Well turn with me to John Chapter 14: v. 2-3. (N.K.J.)

<sup>2</sup> In My Father’s house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also.

We are in the same position as Abram. Jesus has made a promise to us which we have not yet received. With all of our privileges as a Christian, we have not yet received what is promised in this text.

We are standing where Abram stood, we are looking at the promise of Jesus with spiritual eyes. We are in Abram’s sandals.

What keeps us holding on to this promise?

The answer is the character of the person who made the promise. Remember the words of Jesus “If it was not so I would have told you...”

Next we have in the text in v.17 God saying to Abram, "Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you."

In that day Kings used to walk around the land that they had conquered in order to affirm that this land was actually their land.

God was saying to Abram, I have given you this land, why not go around and see what I have given you. It was a sort of foretaste of the future. God was trying to encourage Abram with a foretaste of the future.

Finally in v. 18 we are told that Abram moved his tent and went to dwell by the terebinth trees of Mamre which are in Hebron. He built an altar there to the Lord and continued in worship to God. There is nothing more encouraging than to worship God corporately and privately.

However we need to know God before we can worship Him. Sometimes you can tell the spiritual temperature of a Church by the singing. You can't sing and worship a God who you don't know.

Perhaps today you actually want to know the God of the Bible personally. You can do that today by staying behind and talking and praying with someone about it.

If God has spoken to your heart today, don't delay. Now is the day of Salvation.