

Abraham Friend of God - Back From Rebellion to Communion

by J. Glyn Owen

Abram's story teaches us the importance of returning to God's will and prioritizing our communion with Him over our own desires and associations.

Duration: 42:49

Scripture: Genesis 13:14

Topics: "Abraham"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the story of Abram's return from rebellion and his desire to live in communion with God. Abram had previously gone down to Egypt out of fear of famine, but now he is returning to the land God had called him to. The preacher emphasizes the importance of removing any troublemakers or distractions from our lives in order to hear God's voice clearly. He also highlights the need for solitude in order to experience God's presence and guidance. The sermon references several Bible verses, including Genesis 13, which tells the story of Abram's return, and other passages that emphasize the forgiveness of sins and the invitation for communion with God.

Transcript

Will you kindly turn in the word of Scripture to Genesis chapter 13, and we are going to be meditating on some of the main features of this record of Abram's life to our prophet I trust this morning. We have given the chapter, the title, Back from Rebellion into Communion. Abram was called into a life of communion with God.

That is the link between this subject and what we are especially praying that we shall experience today. Abram was called into a life of walking with God and talking with God and living with God, a life of communion. We ended our last study, however, our last study of the life of Abram, seeing him painfully reproved by the pagan pharaoh of Egypt for his lies, and then officially ejected from Egypt as a persona non grata, and ultimately returning to the area in the land that had been promised to his posterity, and making for a little spot somewhere between Bethel and Ai, where God had appeared to him as clearly as he had originally in his homeland Ur of Chaldeans, and where God had not only appeared to him but spoken to him, and not only spoken to him but covenanted to him that that very land would become the possession of his posterity in days to come.

Get the picture then in miniature. Abram is coming back from a season of rebellion when he went down without command and without permission, when he went down into Egypt because he was afraid of the famine that God had permitted to come his way. But now he is returning from famine and from rebellion, he's returning and he is apparently determined that as he starts life afresh in the land to which God had called him, he's going to live in real communion with God.

There are three points or three passages or three chapters, however you want to look at them, three portraits that I want to bring before you. The first I'm simply going to refer to, it's that of Abram's return from wandering. We've already made reference to it but I just want us to get this clearly in our minds.

Let me read verses three and four. From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the Lord.

In other words what we have here is not simply Abram coming out of Egypt, coming back home after kind of a holiday. Here we have a spiritual retreat, a coming back into the will of God, a coming back into his own territory, the territory that God has given him in title and to his posterity. And here making sure that he's getting back to the place that had been hallowed by previous associations because God had spoken to him there.

He had reared an altar to Jehovah there in the midst of a pagan people. That is but an eloquent way of saying that he's coming back from his spiritual meanderings and wanderings. Two things are involved in that, giving up his own plan, his own self-willed plan and then going back to the divinely willed purpose for his life and the place where that divine will was to be outworked.

Enriched in possessions, albeit spiritually impoverished and humbled, the man whose faith had temporarily lapsed returns to the spiritual altitude to which God had originally called him. Abram had lost height spiritually, lost altitude. Now by the grace of God and the providence that sent him hurriedly out of Egypt and the humiliation that God allowed to come his way, Abram is seen getting back to the place of God's choice.

Now my friends that in miniature may indeed be the background for many of us coming to this communion season. We too may have our Egypt. We too may have made our excursions out of the will of God into some place or other, into some spiritual area or other that is quite illicit, improper, unacceptable to God.

It is not the place of faith and it is not the place for faithful men and women to be. Fear of storms may have sent us scattering into a place where we felt that God's natural laws would look after us and this season is a season for the return of the wayward. May it be so.

May all our hearts return from their wanderings this morning to a place where we can really sing the hymn that we've just sung and our soul vision is God in Christ, his will and his glory and his greatness and his purpose and we find ourselves lost in a sense of awe of obedience and allegiance to him. Now the second thing here Abram's resolve as he returned seems to me that this is the main lesson of chapter 13. It is the fact that that something has come back into Abram's character.

It was there before of course before he set out from Ur of the Chaldees. It really took some doing to go out from Ur of the Chaldees not knowing where he was going to but simply knowing that the one who had called him was really God, the God of glory. But it took some doing.

It took some resolution and then that vanished and he became a little bit fickle and vacillating and easily persuaded to go in the wrong direction and he found himself in Egypt and there in Egypt he did so many things which were outwith the will of God. But in this chapter we see something of Abram's resolve to get right back into the center of God's purposes again. Can I clear up one thing? I think it's always necessary to do it when we speak of Egypt in this way.

The geographical location of Abram with reference to Egypt must be seen as secondary to his spiritual condition. Abram's sin was not so much that he made a visit to Egypt per se. Egypt was not outwith the will of God or the purpose of God as I've heard some people improperly suggesting.

After all Mary and Joseph were commanded by heaven to take the babe Jesus to Egypt where he was safe when he was not safe in the land of promise. Don't let's get this wrongly. Egypt was not a polluted to which no one must go and can't be a Christian if he goes physically to the land of Egypt.

That's not the point. The point is that Abram was running away from a life of confidence in God to a place where he hoped that the overflowing of the Nile would result in sufficient provender for his cattle that he could fend on the basis of natural provisions when God had not told him to go there. In returning you see he is coming away from the natural provisions of Egypt back into dependence upon God and that's the big thing.

Underlying the stark simplicity of this narrative lies the abidingly important principle that God's call is always first and foremost a call into communion with himself into fellowship with himself. There is no way forward for any of us in the Christian life. There is no way forward safe insofar as we learn to have fellowship with God.

Biblical religion centers in that fact. That being so, irresolution at this point is vitally tragic, terribly tragic. If I am not resolute in making provisions for my communion with God to continue at all cost, then sooner or later I shall be an Abram running down to Egypt and maybe not coming out of there again.

I want you to look at the resolution of this man, Abram's resolve as he returned because I would like to see this in my own heart and I would like to see it in yours this morning. It would be wonderful if a congregation of God's people such as this was a congregation of resolved men and women who are resolved in their souls by the grace of God to leave no stone unturned until we know we are back in the place where God wants us to be. Where he can speak to us clearly and we can understand him and we can worship him and we're in the very center of his purposes.

Heaven would rejoice and hell would quake. Now Abram's newfound resolution was reflected first of all in his separation from a source of dispeace and distraction to him. Let me read verses 5 to 7 in chapter 13.

Now Lot, and he centers in this, Lot who was moving about with Abram also had flocks and herds and tents, but the land could not support them while they stayed together. For their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. And quarreling arose among Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot.

The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time. Now scripture does not positively condemn Abram for bringing his nephew Lot with him from Ur of the Chaldees into this new land. Scripture doesn't do that, at least as far as the Genesis record is concerned.

But in Genesis we nevertheless discover that at every turn Lot is depicted as a very unworthy character. Certainly not the kind of person with whom one would like to live. His influence is never going to be very elevating.

Lot is invariably presented in an unfavorable light in the in the book of Genesis. He is shown as a weakling, chapter 19 and verse 6, whose morals ultimately became so depraved and who became so entrenched in the life of Sodom that he literally had to be supernaturally dragged out of it. Had he been left to himself he would still be in Sodom, if he were alive.

But supernaturally he had to be excavated morally and spiritually and physically out of a place. And even when thus saved from its curse and its judgment, he relapsed again into temporary drunkenness, if you please, and further disgrace which I will not mention. Even so that's not the whole truth.

And you see this is why it's so important to read the whole Bible and to know the whole. Judging from Genesis you would see, you would think that Lot was unmitigatedly evil, unqualified evil. But when you come to the New Testament and to the epistle written by Peter, you will find that the New Testament has something else to say about him.

And there he is referred to as a righteous man who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men. Let me continue, tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard. That's 2 Peter 2 verses 7 and 8. So you see there are two sides to Lot.

Evidently at one period in his life he was almost given to sin, given to evil, given to compromise morally and otherwise, until he became almost as bad as the Sodomites. But scripture is very fair and very honest. Scripture says that there was another side to the man.

He was indeed a man of God. He was too a man of faith. And Abram could legitimately call him brother as he does in one place.

Not just kinsman, but brother. At this point in time, however, Lot and his servants were a cause of spiritual distraction for Abram, creating dispeace and confusion so that Abram's Godward relationship suffered. We see something of Abram's resolve coming through, however, in his willingness at this point to come to this decision.

If it is necessary then I've got a part with Lot. Now there was a lot of sentiment around Lot. Lot was the son of his dead brother.

He was his nephew. Abram had been a father to him and a mother to him probably. And so you see there was an awful lot of sentiment that bound Lot and Abram together.

And probably that's why Abram has put up with a lot of Lot's nonsense up to this point. Pardon me putting it like that. But Lot's influence upon Abram was not for good and Abram knew it.

And he knew that the point had come now where if he's going on into a deepening communion with God, he's just got to get away from Lot. You know anything of that circumstance? It is exceedingly sad to note, of course, that the cause of the disagreement between Lot's servants and Abram's who were quarreling among one another and adding to the confusion was the multiplicity of their cattle. They got so rich.

In other words, they were too rich to be at peace. You can be too rich to get on with your neighbor. It's a very challenging statement.

You can be too rich to have fellowship with another weaker brother. It is doubly sad to note that the accumulated cattle on both sides, however, were largely gotten in Haran where God never meant them to stay and in Egypt where God never meant them to go. God allows men and women sometimes to become materially rich in their backslidings and the very richest that they've gotten in their backsliding will be the clamp of hell upon their future days.

Be careful. Be careful. But the point I want to note at this stage is that Abram was now determined even to part with Lot if isn't necessary, even with Lot.

Abram's resolve in this matter is further revealed in the voluntary humiliation he accepted in asking Lot to choose which way he would go. You see, you might have expected something like this in Abram. You might have expected him to be peeved and cross with Lot and say, look, look, fellow, I brought you away from home.

I brought you a thousand miles up the Euphrates Valley. I brought you into the land of Shechem. Here you are.

You owe everything to me. Get going where I tell you and don't come back to my, for me to see you again. You could have envisaged Abram saying that.

You know, that's nothing of the kind that we have here. Listen to it. It's almost idyllic.

So Abram said to Lot, the culprit. Abram said to Lot, let's not have any quarreling between you and me or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Now, this is exciting.

Let's part company, he said. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right. And if you go to the right, I'll go to the left.

You see the point. There's no carnal enmity here. There's a determination here to separate from Lot because Lot is a nuisance spiritually and he can't get on whilst Lot is there.

He's come to that conclusion. Whether he was right in coming to that conclusion is beside the point. But he did thus conclude he must get away from Lot.

But having determined that he must get away from Lot, you notice he does it with caution. He does it with a compassion and a large heartedness that is something singular. You see Abram's humility here.

At a time in history when age was the key to honor and one of the marks of greatness, Abram, the older man by far, voluntarily overlooked his own prerogatives and determined the terms of the separation envisaged. And he did it in this way. He did not choose for himself, but he said to Lot, Lot, I'm determining that you should choose.

Now that was a total violation of custom. But such was Abram's determination to safeguard his relationship with God that he virtually makes it impossible for the younger man to say no. Along with his humility, look at his magnanimity.

The man of faith made this humble choice because he not only, he was not only concerned for his own relationship with God, but he was also concerned for Lot. You may well ask as you read this passage, why did Abram do that? And people will give you different answers. I want to suggest you the answer that I think is natural and almost arising out of the passage.

I like to think it is. Abram was concerned for Lot's spiritual welfare as he was concerned for his own, but he couldn't tolerate his influence upon himself. But he doesn't want to see Lot and himself separating in such a way that they will forevermore be enemies.

So he wants Lot to have a happy thought and to be in a happy frame of mind when he separates. And so you see, he wants to keep the lines of communication open with Lot, even if Lot is going to leave him. So that should things go wrong with Lot, Lot will want to come back to his uncle rather than want to keep away from him.

And that's exactly what happened when you go on to chapter 14, things went topsy-turvy with Lot and he had no one else to turn to. As a matter of fact, he didn't come to Abram, Abram went to him. But the fact is there, Abram's large heartedness toward Lot remains here as it's undergirding everything else.

And so he tells Lot, Lot, you choose, have a good look. And he bids him look all around. And now he says, whichever way you want to go, I'll go in the opposite way.

And he did so, let me repeat, because he was determined that he must separate from this man because of his influence. But if he must separate, he will separate, not as an enemy separates from an enemy, but as a friend separates from another. Along with Abram's newfound resolution in matters relating to God, we also notice a revived conviction, such as inspired his faith in former days.

You see now, a sort of revival in miniature, spiritually speaking. You see Abram regaining something that he had when he first heard the call of God and stepped out from Ur of the Chaldees. First of all, there is the conviction that fellowship with the deity is more important than friendship with any of his closest and even his nearest and dearest.

And it was a decision he had to make a way back in Ur of the Chaldees. There were many members of the family that could never come with him, they'd never been asked. But God called him, some of them went with him, Terah his father-in-law for example.

But this man Abram had to make a decision, what's the important thing? Is it the knowledge of the God of glory and going with him and living with him and depending upon him, or is it maintaining the kinship and the family tie? Oh, how the family tie can be a chain upon our neck sometimes. Many men and women have been chained outside the will of God just because of this, and it's become an excuse for not doing things and not going places. And heaven only knows how many have suffered in the bargain.

When Abram went out from Ur of the Chaldees, there was a determination, there was a determination of faith. It is more important to be right with a God of glory, the real God, and to live in comfort with my own people and get on with them. He didn't minimize the importance of their needs, but this was the first thing.

Then there is the conviction that the spiritual is essentially more important than the material. This is involved in Abram, Abram's experience in chapter 13. Abram here is re-emerging as one who places his spirituality before his material prosperity.

You see, he gave Lot the opportunity of choosing, and Lot knew what to choose. He had cattle as Abram had cattle, and he saw the green pasture lands down in the south there. My, says Lot, I don't need to think the second time.

I know the way I'm going. And dear old Abram had to put up with what was left. And remember, these were days of famine.

But you see, the point is this, by this time Abram had said to himself and was resolute in saying it, being with God, communion with God is more important than multiplying cattle. Have you got there? Are we there this morning? Do we have communion with God on that level this morning? Then this, the conviction that faith in God is more important than the fulfillment of his, for the fulfillment of his promises, than the fostering of a human association to look after his own interests. You may wonder, what am I getting at? God had said to Abram that he would give him seed, and that his descendants should inhabit that very land that Abram was then standing on.

But Abram didn't have a child. Sarah was barren. What's the use of talking about a promise for posterity when you haven't got the first child? It seemed so dark and dismal and utterly hopeless, humanly speaking.

Ah, but society had one ingenious suggestion to make at this point in time. In a situation like this, if you had anyone else in the family such as a nephew, and especially if his father or his mother had died, he was reckoned as the adopted son. And God might very well fulfill his promise of posterity through who? Lot.

And so inevitably the question would come to a man like Abram, well now, can I not conclude that the providence that shut up Sarah's womb, and it is impossible for her to have a child, can I not legitimately conclude that the same providence has brought into our family this boy Lot, so that the promises that God has made may be fulfilled. There is no other way. How else can they be fulfilled? Humanly speaking, you see, there was no other way.

But now wait a moment. Oh, this is faith emerging. It's beautiful.

It makes you worship God that a thing like this can happen. Now, way back thousands of years ago, in the life of a man that had no background such as you and I have, Abram thought about it. And he says something like this to himself, no, God didn't say to me that the promise was to be fulfilled in Lot, my seed, my seed, he's not my seed.

He may be my adopted child, but he's not my seed. God said my seed. So he will part from Lot.

And in a sense, the worldly wise would say to him that in parting from Lot, he's parting from the other one who the only one who can be the main link in the fulfillment of the God of God's promises to him and to his posterity. But he parted from Lot, you see, believing in his God, faith is renewed. It lapsed when he went down into Egypt and he began to lie and whatnot.

But now it's renewed again. Our God who first creates faith is a God who also renews faith. Lastly, and I must conclude with this very briefly, Abram's reward following his resolute stand.

There's no need for God to give us rewards. No reason why he should at all, because we don't deserve rewards. Rewards that God gives his people are not rewards that are earned.

Rather, are they what he deems in his wisdom he wants and desires to give us when we don't deserve it in order to encourage us. Verses 14 to 18 are very important here. God now steps into the scene to reassure Abram of the rightness of his decision, but also of his own reward.

Now look, first of all, at this. God intervened to remove Abram's sense of loss and loneliness at the departure of Lot. Just notice these words.

Verse 14. The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had parted from him, lift up your eyes and see to the north, to the south, to the east, and to the west. Now never mind what he said for the moment.

That's not the point. We may come to that. But just notice, Lot is gone and all is silent.

The Perizzites and the Canaanites are in the land. Who has Abram got to talk to? Only poor Sarah and his slaves. Maybe some he got in Haran, some he got in Egypt, but he's all alone.

But listen, my friend, to what happened, don't miss it for your soul's sake. When Lot, the troublemaker, is gone and all is silent, God breaks the silence with his own voice. When Lot moved away, God moved in.

And I want to say with all solemnity that there may be something in your life this morning that has got to go out before God moves in in communing grace and mercy. It is exceedingly sad that it should be necessary under any circumstances, but our fallen world often requires us likewise to be alone before we can clearly hear the voice of God or sense his mighty presence. As the sound of Lot and his servants' voices became gradually more remote, God's voice became clearer and clearer.

And then this. In so doing, God also repeated yet again his previous promises to Abram, doing so in still clearer terms than he'd done so before. Verses 14 to 16.

I won't read them. Now, the promise of land had been given at least twice before, land to Abram's posterity. But now you see, God does something again.

God's repetitions are so precious. He adds something special to the promises he's given before. I've no time to go into that.

But the thing I want you to get is this. He turns to Abram and he says, Abram, look north, south, east and west. Take a panoramic view of everything.

And he says, all that land is yours and your seed. But I can hear Abram saying, but God, Lot's gone down there to the best of the land and that will belong to him. No, says God, it's yours.

There's not an inch of the land for Lot. It's all yours in the promise. You who gave it up in obedience will receive it out of the grace of my heart.

God is no man's debtor. What faith had just surrendered for God's glory, grace now put it back into the same hands. Lot will inherit nothing but shame.

And then God clinched all else with a marvelous reassurance concerning the promised seed. Lot's departure cannot forfeit that promise nor mildly affect it. The man of faith now living in communion with God must think big.

Think big, says God to him. He ever tried to count the multitude of the number of little grains of sand or of soil? Ever tried to count a handful of grain? See the grain on the seashores and on the earth that cover the earth and try to count them. Your seed will be as many as that, he says.

Can you see what's happening? This man wondered. He went the wrong way. He was a man of faith.

He traveled far by faith. He'd been raised high by faith and by the grace of the God who gave him that faith. Then he went back.

Just your experience and mine, we go up and up by the grace of God and then we slide back. And he went back and that Egyptian visit was a backsliding episode, unworthy of him as our Egyptian visits are unworthy of us. But the God who had begun in him a good work went after him and dealt with him again and brought him out and used Pharaoh to humble him and to tell him that things like that are not done in Egypt.

They're not done in pagan lands. You shouldn't have lied to me about your wife. I might have taken her to be my wife and I might have molested her and so forth.

Abraham, he says, you shouldn't have dealt like that. Have you ever been humbled by the unbelievers? Have you ever been humbled by unbelieving men and women? You who bear the name of Jesus should never have been in that place, should never have been doing that thing. And they know and they may have told you so.

God bless them. We need the worldling to speak plainly to us sometimes, as the Egyptians did to Abram. But at last Abram gets back and he's determined now, not playing anymore, not trifling anymore.

Mind you, he will. He'll break his word again before the end. But at this moment in time, he's determined and he comes back and the picture we see of him at the end of chapter 13 is a magnificent one.

He's in the right place. He's in the place of those holy associations to which we've referred. And he's rearing yet another altar in that pagan land to say, I believe in the God of glory and I worship him.

And it's not only one spot of land in Canaan that belongs to him, but another spot of land. And he will be worshipped here as he is worshipped there. And if no one else agrees with me, I'm going on as the worshipper of the great God of glory back in communion, back in communion, back in communion.

Isn't it wonderful? There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin. There's a door that is open and you and I may go in. There's a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come into him and sup with him, commune with him.

And he with me. Oh, may this be a time this morning when all wanderers from the path of faith have not only turned around from our Egyptian residences, albeit temporary, but are on the move and have an altar in our lives on which we daily sacrifice our all to the great God of glory, the God of Calvary. And to his name be all the praise.

Amen.

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